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# THE CRITICS' DILEMMA

by

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*Further comments on some nineteenth century  
investigations*

1966



ANNIE EVA FAY  
1851-1927

## PREFACE

In putting together the following notes on the alleged mediumship of three famous Victorian women it has been my principal aim to examine the value of some of the main criticisms directed against Mr. Trevor Hall, who was the first to publish a detailed account of some of the mysterious events connected with their activities. In addition I have attempted to throw some light on the methods used by some of the early psychical researchers in conducting their investigations and on the extent to which the records they left may be considered reliable.

For facilitating the examination and verification of the many documents and papers consulted I have to thank the Secretaries of the Society for Psychical Research and the College of Psychic Science, The New York Public Library, officials of the Royal Photographic Society and Mr. Mostyn Gilbert, who has allowed me to draw from his material relating to Mary Showers and Annie Eva Fay. I have also to thank Dr. N. M. Davis, Dr. Alan Gauld, Mr. A. Ivey, Mr. A. S. Jarman, Mr. R. G. Medhurst and Mrs. P. Springford. Finally I have to thank the Curators of the Harvard College Library Theatre Collection for permission to reproduce as the frontispiece the photograph of Annie Eva Fay, which has been taken from their collection of material on Miss Fay and which shows her at the period (1874) under discussion.

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CROWHURST, BATTLE,  
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# I

## FLORENCE ELIZA COOK

In 1962 Mr. Trevor H. Hall published in his *The Spiritualists*, the first full length study of the extraordinary story of the relationship between Crookes (later Sir William Crookes, O.M., and President of the Royal Society) and the young nineteenth century medium Florence Cook, whose full-form materializations became the talk of every Spiritualistic circle in London and even abroad. Crookes carried out a prolonged investigation of Miss Cook and vouched for her honesty and integrity and the reality of the materialized form of "Katie King" who appeared at her séances, many of which were held in Crookes's own house and in the presence of his wife and other relatives. Although at the time certain critical observers suggested that Crookes had become infatuated with Florence Cook, attempts to solve the mystery of his behaviour and conduct of the séances failed, just as later discussions did nothing to throw further light on the mystery.

The problem presented a dilemma that seemed inescapable. To Spiritualists and those psychical researchers who believed in Florence Cook there was no problem. But for those who were unable to accept the reality of this astonishing miracle on the evidence furnished by Crookes a very real difficulty arose. They saw that if Florence Cook were not genuine then it would seem that either Crookes was deceived, which from his own records seems impossible, or, as a contemporary writer put it, he was an ally rather than a victim. In order to suggest the reason for this alliance Mr. Hall put forward the theory, based partly but by no means wholly on the alleged testimony of Florence Cook herself, that she was his mistress at the relevant time and that he was her confederate in the fraudulent manifestations.

In *The Spiritualists* Mr. Hall condensed a mass of material gathered from contemporary books, periodicals and unpublished official sources. On publication the book was greeted with approval by literary reviewers as contributing a new chapter to nineteenth century Spiritualism. The reaction of Spiritualists and psychical researchers, however, was very different. Some of them

made hysterical attacks on Mr. Hall; while the more serious parapsychologists, instead of dealing unemotionally with Mr. Hall's main thesis, preferred to search his book for omissions, errors of fact or inference and mistakes in punctuation. Now that the principal reviews and criticisms have been published I propose to examine some of these, attempt to appraise their value and try to determine how far they have been successful in shaking the main contention of the prosecution, namely that Florence was not a genuine materializing medium and that William Crookes was her accomplice in the frauds. It is this theory that Mr. Hall's critics have to demolish. They have to show that the evidence for Crookes's complicity is not sufficient and that the facts only go so far as to show either (1) that Florence Cook was genuine or (2) that she was fraudulent and that Crookes was deceived.

All discussion as to whether Mr. Hall inserted or did not insert quotation marks before a verse by Byron, or whether he was mistaken in stating that certain events took place in one house when his critics maintain that it was not that house but another one, is beside the point. These points have been emphasized in order to try to show that Mr. Hall is inaccurate, unreliable and careless, but they do nothing to help the defence in their main task, which is to prove Crookes's innocence and that of his protégée. In their dilemma and their contortions to avoid making a decision they do not, I think, present a very happy spectacle.

In addition to dealing with Florence Cook I have taken the opportunity to pay some attention to the relations between William Crookes, F. W. H. Myers and Mr. and Mrs. Henry Sidgwick on the one hand and the American vaudeville performer Annie Eva Fay and the still more strange and baffling personality of the materializing medium Mary Rosina Showers on the other. The story of the "investigation" of these other two remarkable young women throws a flood of light on the attitudes of the learned and distinguished founders of psychical research in Victorian England and perhaps helps to explain why during his lifetime Crookes was never asked by his colleagues to supply better proof of the miracles that he said he was witnessing.

The Society for Psychical Research had elected Crookes to its Council in 1890, and there he remained until his death in 1919. The Council, therefore, had about thirty years in which to ask him for a written statement on the whole matter, but I know of no record of its ever having done so. Late in 1902 Frank

Podmore's *Modern Spiritualism* was published, being advertised in the Society's *Journal* in January, 1903. The book was reviewed the next month by Miss Alice Johnson in the *Proceedings*. In this book Podmore discussed Crookes's experiments with Miss Cook and Miss Fay, pointing out many highly suspicious circumstances, but Miss Johnson mentioned neither. During this period Crookes was Vice-President of the Society and the apparent failure of any of his colleagues (including Podmore) to ask him for a statement appears, to me at least, somewhat significant. Perhaps, on the other hand, they did so and were refused. In 1906, however, Crookes was quick to deal with one of Florence Marryat's fairy stories that had been attributed to him. This story did not in any way try to discredit Crookes's bona fides. As Ralph Shirley remarked in 1919, nobody had up to then been hardy enough to do this, which was left to Mr. Hall in 1962. On the other hand, when challenged by foreign correspondents over the Florence Cook affair, Crookes sometimes replied in a somewhat disingenuous manner. For example, towards 1902 he was asked by Dr. Carlo del Lungo of Spezzia whether it was true that since his former séances with her she had been caught in a fraudulent imitation of the phantom Katie King, apparently referring to the Sitwell exposure of 1880. In his reply Crookes stated that during the last twenty-five years he had had only one sitting with Florence Cook and that he knew "absolutely nothing of the circumstance" referred to by Dr. Lungo.

The Spiritualists also, whose interest in Crookes and Florence Cook was merely in the propaganda value they could obtain from them, had done nothing to examine the question afresh; and before Mr. Hall's book was published, one of their leaders told me that little was known of her sister, Kate Cook, or what became of her. The whole sordid Blackburn story was apparently almost completely unknown, until Mr. Hall revealed it, both to the leaders of the S.P.R. and to Spiritualists alike. Yet the S.P.R. had, as I have said, an unequalled opportunity to take some action. All the Council had to do was to ask their colleague for further information about those miracles which he had described with such eloquence and poetic fervour in the Spiritualist press. It is interesting that when it was a question of the mediumship of D. D. Home there was apparently no hesitation in asking both Sir William and Lady Crookes for their comments on certain sittings (see *Proceedings*, S.P.R., 1894, IX, pp. 308, 310). There must have been some reason why Crookes maintained this attitude of secrecy about Florence Cook to the end of his life and why

those who had the opportunity did not question him on certain puzzling aspects of the case, such as the connections between Miss Cook and Miss Showers and the famous letter from Lady Crookes on the Leila materializations (see I, p. 69). An admirable opportunity presented itself in 1900 when Dr. A. Lehmann's criticisms of Crookes's experiments with Home were discussed in the *Journal of the S.P.R.* (Vol. IX, pp. 322ff.). To those remarks Crookes replied that, when the "higher criticism" appeared in which *all* that he had written on the subject was compared, collated and reviewed, he would have no anxiety as to the result. Might he not have been then asked to produce his original notes on the sittings with Florence Cook, Eva Fay and Mary Showers so that the "higher criticism" might have something to work on? Was it not only a few years before that Myers maintained that those who believed that they had genuine phenomena to which they could point should be anxious to put this evidence carefully and straightforwardly before the world? Crookes, it seems, did not respond to this invitation.

It is true that Mr. Benjamin Coleman, one of the most enthusiastic of the group of Spiritualists in the 1870's, and who claimed Crookes as his "excellent pupil", tried in 1874 to get the said pupil to answer a few straight questions about Katie King. To Coleman's surprise, Crookes refused to answer his letter and never mentioned the matter to him again. This "studied reticence", as Coleman called it, seemed to him very odd, as odd indeed as the whole set-up at the Cooks' home at Hackney seemed to another of the old stalwarts, Samuel Carter Hall, who was once present at a séance where, if fraudulent, a confederate seemed likely, but if so then, he thought, the whole family must have been involved, including Crookes himself. To Mr. S. C. Hall this seemed unlikely, although he gave it as his opinion that he could imagine Crookes to be a rogue rather than a fool, an ally rather than a victim.

The dilemma facing Mr. S. C. Hall was precisely that of modern writers. Can it really be believed that Crookes, who actually acted as Florence Cook's manager and controller of many sittings, was so blindly credulous that *if* she were fraudulent *he* was deceived? *If* again she were fraudulent and Crookes was not deceived, he *must* have been the rogue and ally mentioned by S. C. Hall. On the other hand, Florence, of course, *may* have been genuine and Katie King a real "materialization". If this be so, then Crookes's way of recording this astounding miracle,

his extraordinary behaviour at the sittings — described by one observer as half-showman and half play-actor — and his studied reticence when questioned by the man who claimed him as his pupil becomes, to me at least, inexplicable.

All these problems remained undiscussed in any detail by psychical researchers and Spiritualists until Mr. Trevor Hall, an independent professional man and a magistrate, decided to investigate the case himself and after months of the most painstaking and laborious research, decided to open the case for the prosecution and put forward the theory that Florence Cook was fraudulent, that Crookes was indeed the rogue and ally hinted at by Mr. Hall's namesake and that the reason for Crookes's action was the fact that Florence had seduced him and the price of her favours was the support of her mediumship at a very important stage of her career.

The book created a sensation and leading Spiritualists and prominent members of the Society for Psychical Research, who had never made any attempt whatever to solve this astonishing mystery, now appeared in quite a new rôle. With feverish excitement they began to ransack archives and delve into obscure journals. Having for years assisted in the destruction of hundreds of documents belonging to the Society, with the permission and by order of the Council,<sup>1</sup> they now found that what had been destroyed might have contained the facts for which they were searching. The Barrett Papers had been either lost or destroyed and since Sir William had personally known many of the personalities concerned the inability to consult these valuable documents proved most irritating to the new investigators.

Of all the criticisms of *The Spiritualists* that by Mrs. K. M. Goldney and Mr. R. G. Medhurst (1) is by far the best. It is a careful, well-documented piece of work which has obviously been the result of a great deal of research, founded in part on the information that Mr. Hall collected. Having with great industry and labour collected a mass of material, the authors end with two questions — (1) "Was Crookes duped?" and (2) Are we to believe that in dealing with the phenomena of psychical research the investigators may "suffer hallucinations unmatched elsewhere in the domain of the sane, and become veritably bewitched?"

<sup>1</sup>No inventory of what was destroyed was kept and even Robert Cooper's unpublished manuscript relating to his sittings with Mrs. Thayer found its way into the waste-paper basket. It is doubtful if a single Member of the Society's Council had ever heard of Cooper or Mrs. Thayer.

It is there, apparently, that the defence rests. For some reason, difficult for me to understand, they cannot bring themselves to contemplate calmly the theory that Crookes was not duped by Florence Cook, but was her willing ally. It is true that he may have been duped by other mediums, as seems to me very possible, such as charming ladies like Annie Eva Fay, or performers like William Hope. But was he duped, could he conceivably have been duped by Florence Cook? To anybody who is really acquainted with the facts the answer must, I would suppose, be an emphatic NO. Thus the defence, if they would only face the facts, must be driven to the conclusion that Florence Cook was "genuine" and Katie King and Leila "real" materialized "spirit-forms". The alternative preferred by the prosecution is for them too unpleasant and unlikely to be really seriously considered. *That* theory must be disposed of as best it may.

Before dealing with the attempts of the defence to weaken the evidence for Crookes's complicity, it may be well to say something about a matter on which Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst seem to me to have laid a mistaken emphasis. They speak (1, p. 28) of the remarkable things that were happening in the second half of the nineteenth century and state that in those days there was an important difference in the "psychological atmosphere" compared with that prevalent to-day (1, p. 134). This seems to me to be very doubtful. Are the miracles associated with the names of Florence Cook, Mary Showers, Dr. Monck, Mrs. Guppy, Miss Fay and the rest in the 1870's any more remarkable than those with Carrie Sawyer, Countess Castelnitch, Franek Kluski, Lajos Pap, Eva C., Jan Guzik, Maria Silbert, Carlos Mirabelli, Margery Crandon or the Brazilian mediums in Uberaba? The events recorded from 1872 onwards in *The Spiritualist* seem to me no more remarkable and in many ways more critically treated than those described to-day week by week in *Psychic News*; and those who believed in the stories put out by the earlier paper have a very similar mentality to those who believe the tales recorded in the later journal. The "psychological atmosphere" seems to me the same, but it is not the atmosphere of the *period* but the atmosphere around certain groups of *persons*. Almost as I write these words a psychic journal just issued is placed on my desk. Here I read that a carved wooden African head caused any amount of misfortune to those who possessed it, that three bonfires on which it was placed failed even to scorch it and that it was finally sent to a Cabinet Minister; within a week the Profumo scandal broke, presumably caused by the head. In

the same issue I learn that apports used to come tinkling down the small end of Mrs. Estelle Roberts's trumpet; that a gentleman in Puerto Rico, a deaf-mute since birth, speaks and sings in perfect English; that a full-form materialization of a person just dead appeared before twenty witnesses; and that in England a rector stated that two pigs had been reduced to skeletons through the evil eye. Nothing from the 1870's could really approach this miscellany of marvels.

It is, of course, true that in the middle of the nineteenth century many members of polite society became keenly interested in Spiritualism, which became much more widely known than it would otherwise have done, mainly on account of the reports concerning the mediumship of D. D. Home. But with the latter's gradual withdrawal from the scene and the rise of the "spirit-forms", popular interest began to decline and Spiritualism became more and more the interest of a few groups in which well-educated persons were in the minority. Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst seem to me to have so soaked themselves in the Spiritualistic atmosphere generated by such papers as *The Spiritualist*, *The Medium and Daybreak* and *Spiritual Notes* that they have brought themselves to believe that educated society in England was all breathlessly waiting for what was next to emerge from the Punch and Judy cabinet at Hackney or timidly looking upwards on the chance of seeing Mrs. Guppy or Dr. Monck passing overhead on one of their little aerial journeys. They seem to have forgotten that intelligent people had much more interesting things to think about. The "Challenger" expedition was in progress: Caton was beginning to study electrical responses in the brain and Koch was giving his sensational results on the development of anthrax. Mill's individualism was being attacked by Stephens, Wundt was stressing the importance of psychology as an experimental science, the Universal Postal Union was instituted and Brahms' Requiem completed. Moreover, as Viscount Amberley remarked in his article in *The Fortnightly Review* in 1874, rational men were not disposed to look into evidence presented by persons who betrayed such a hopeless inability to discriminate between adequate and inadequate proof of facts or between unintelligible realities and commonplace imposture. As to the Spiritualists, he remarked, not only do they greedily accept jugglery as manifestations of spirits, but jugglery of the most vulgar order at once imposes on them.

Apart from the enthusiastic supporters of the Spiritualist Movement, such as S. C. Hall, Cromwell Varley, Mrs. Makdougall Gregory, Florence Marryat and the Countess of Caithness, interest was mainly sustained by those outside the inner circles, such as minor novelists like Annie Hall Thomas and Mabel Collins, society folk like Sir Charles Isham and the Cowper-Temples and a few scientific men like Sir William Crookes, Francis Galton and members of the Rayleigh family. Indeed, had it not been for the widespread exploitation of Crookes's work as propaganda by the Spiritualists it is unlikely that men of a scientific and critical turn of mind would have paid much attention to the subject, even though some of them probably read the articles in *The Times*, *The Daily Telegraph* and *The Morning Post*. As it was, many critical writers seemed unaware of what was going on, or perhaps thought that the stories of the astonishing events at Hackney and Teignmouth were beneath their notice. For example, Frederic Harrison in his famous 1877 article on the future life seems not to have thought that the proofs offered by Katie King, Lillie Gordon, Florence Maple or Lenore Fitzwarren worth mentioning; and in the discussion of his paper (2) the disputants also remained silent.<sup>1</sup> These included Roden Noel, who, in spite of his apparent inclination to believe in the genuineness of materialization as expressed in his book *A Philosophy of Immortality* (p. 109) which was published by Mr. W. H. Harrison in 1882, said nothing on these matters. The same might be remembered in the case of Sir Edwin Arnold who attended séances but who does not seem to have been impressed by the visitors from the Other World, if we can judge from his *Death — and afterwards* (London, 1887) where he appears to have forgotten to mention them. Indeed, the subject was made ridiculous and an object of satire even by some who had seen many of the mediums and had contributed articles about them. Thus, the author of *Maud Blount* (3) who, it is said, was Dr. C. Maurice Davies, made fun of the whole matter, concealing the real characters under other names, although readers of the period and well-informed students to-day could hardly fail to recognize Mrs. Pugsby, Mr. Blathersby, Professor Buncombe, Mr. Frank Squirm and Signor Guglielmo. Many must have felt like Sir William Hardman, who was interested enough in the 1860's to read such articles as Bell's famous paper in the August, 1860, number of *The Cornhill Magazine*, but who simply could not be

<sup>1</sup>Leslie Stephen went so far as to declare that Spiritualism was a "disgusting subject" (*Fortnightly Review*, 1877, N.S., XXII, p. 355).

bothered to follow up the tales he heard and so contented himself with exclaiming: - "But enough of this! — it is all Sola! Sola! Sola!" (*Letters and Memoirs*, London, 1923, p. 15).

Again, another point which was stressed by the author of the widely read article "Seeing is Believing" was that the conditions under which many of the sittings were held were not conducive to investigation. As the author puts it (4, p. 387), in the drawing room they were restrained by politeness from taking the most ordinary precautions, an opinion also emphasized by Mrs. Lynn Linton, who had little patience with the mediums and who stated that in her experience even the smallest investigation was not allowed and the most elementary precautions against imposture were not carried out. Indeed, she added, the amount of patent falsehood swallowed open-mouthed had been to her a sorry text on which to preach a eulogium on our enlightenment (5, p. 173).

In supporting his case, Mr. Trevor Hall makes use of what has been called the "Anderson Testimony" and it is this witness who has been the subject of most vigorous criticism by the defence (6, pp. 132-139). In 1922 my friend Mr. W. Marriott told me that he had met a gentleman by the name of Anderson who had known Florence Cook and that she had told him about Crookes's experiments with her. I therefore wrote to Mr. Anderson asking him to come and see me at the rooms of the S.P.R. This he did some time later and it was then that he told me that he had been intimate with her and that she had told him that Crookes was infatuated with her, taking her to Paris now and then for week-ends.

There did not seem to me anything very astonishing in this, as persons living at the time had noted Crookes's extraordinary behaviour at the séances and the marked attentions that he paid to Katie King. But in my notes of 1922 I made no mention of an assertion by Anderson that Florence told him that Crookes was her accomplice.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>In spite of the elaborate disguise which the author of *Maud Blount* has covered his characters, he now and then skims the surface of the sexual intrigues which abounded at the time and tells the story of the blushing Maud when forced to read a slip of paper Mrs. Pugsby pushed forward to her. On it were the words "W.C. loves you", the W.C. being William Campbell (3, p. 44). In this connection it is suggestive that Mr. Nelson Holmes, in his letter to D. D. Home in 1876, stated that Mrs. Guppy gave séances solely for assignation meetings to better enable certain disreputable parties "to further carry out their lewd propensities" (1, p. 59).

I found Anderson a most amusing person, with an extraordinary memory for detail, a feature also noted by Mrs. Goldney, who in 1949 had a long talk with him in which he again mentioned the story of his association with Florence and added that she had told him that her phenomena were fraudulent. In a written statement the same year he affirmed that she had said that she had done all this in collusion with William Crookes (7, p. 94).

In my own relations with Anderson I found that he seemed to have no interest whatever in psychical research as such, but one statement he made to Mrs. Goldney in his talk with her in 1949 is of great interest in this connection. She had mentioned the S.P.R. to him and it was then he said, "Oh yes, the Society for Psychical Research ; I went there once *about Sir William Crookes*" (my italics) (6, p. 136).

Now, why should Anderson go to the S.P.R. about Sir William Crookes? Although unfortunately I have no documentary proof, my memory seems clear. He came to the S.P.R. to state that he had been told by Florence Cook that Crookes had been her accomplice in her fraudulent mediumship. This assertion did not surprise me then, as it does not surprise me now. After all, the evidence for the genuineness of Florence Cook's mediumship can hardly be considered striking and the defence seems to me to have avoided discussing it in detail. Indeed, Dr. R. H. Thouless, a Past President of the S.P.R., stated that the strongest argument for it was perhaps Crookes's endorsement of the medium (8, p. 267) which might be expected since this critic regards the Anderson depositions as "worthless as evidence" (9, p. 127).

Anderson's lack of interest in psychical research was apparent both to me at our first meeting and to Mrs. Goldney at her first interview. He was inclined to be muddled over the stories that Florence told him of certain "spirit photographs" and also about the incident when he said that Florence had stayed in Crookes's house and that he told Mrs. Crookes that she was a "materialized spirit" (6, p. 138). This supposed mistake was corrected by Mrs. Goldney, who apparently had not thought that Florence Cook might have told Anderson that Crookes had said that "Florence" was a materialized spirit, referring of course to Florence Maple, Miss Mary Showers's "full form" who paraded round Crookes's laboratory arm in arm with Katie King, a sight which aroused the astonishment of Sergeant Cox, who in a memorable passage described the performance of these two full form materializations which appeared to him to be absolute facsimiles

of the two mediums. Since it was alleged by Crookes that later Miss Showers "confessed" that she was a fraud (a fact which he attempted to conceal, except from his private friends) this strange exhibition has caused the defence grave difficulty. Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst attempted one explanation in their paper (1, p. 123). If, they suggest, Crookes were convinced of Florence Cook's authenticity, then his behaviour over the Showers crisis becomes comprehensible. On the other hand, they state that as far as they know he never offered to explain away this very difficult situation of a genuine Katie King playing about with a spurious Florence Maple.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, in order to explain away the mass of evidence in support of Miss Showers's marvellous mediumship, they have had to consider the possibility (1, p. 118) that three of the most vocal and respectable witnesses of these miracles, both with Florence and Mary, namely Messrs. Luxmoore, Dunphy and Tapp, all acted as Mary Showers's confederates. Mr. Luxmoore was of a well-known Devon county family and a Justice of the Peace, Mr. Dunphy a London barrister and journalist who wrote for *The Morning Post* and Mr. G. R. Tapp was a civil servant connected with the Post Office. What conceivable motive could have inspired these people to act as confederates to Mary Showers? I do not know, neither do I understand why Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst do not at the same time seem to suspect them of similar activities with Florence Cook, concerning whose mediumship all three were closely associated, acting as they did as some of her most enthusiastic supporters. Towards the end of Luxmoore's life (he died in 1881) a lady who had been with him during his last illness is said to have stated that he had grown weary of the unsatisfactory sort of testimony adduced for materializations, a remarkable confession since it had been he who had been most active in furthering the activities of the mediums and in supporting their claims.

It was only five years previously that another prominent supporter of the mediums said that in his opinion four out of every five of the ghost materialization shows narrated in the weekly Spiritualistic journals were delusions and snares, the full-forms being the mediums themselves "biologized by ghosts". We shall return to Mary Showers later.

<sup>1</sup> It was only a few weeks before that Florence Cook was kissing Florence Maple and, being a distinguished spectator, was allowed to look into the cabinet where she said she saw Mary Showers in her chair, Florence Maple and another full form dressed as a man.

According to the defence Anderson's statements cannot be relied on. Such suggestions as that it was I who put ideas into his head, that his memory was gravely at fault, that his knowledge of the Blackburn swindle (if it can be justly called this) was due to information derived from other sources and similar surmises have all been advanced in order to explain away Anderson's statement. But unfortunately for those who want us to believe that Anderson was a silly old man, full of false memories of a glamorous past, those who knew him do not agree. Mrs. Goldney herself, who knew him well, described him as "a most remarkable man, mentally extremely young for his age and . . . remembering details extremely well" (6, p. 137). He even told her that Florence spoke of her daughters, giving their names as "Katie"<sup>1</sup> and "Edith" which was correct. It would be interesting to hear how those who maintain the "worthlessness" of Anderson's testimony can explain his memory of these names. Moreover, it was not only the names. In his signed statement of 4 December, 1949, in mentioning these two children he said that one was *seventeen*. One of her daughters was born in Shanghai on 24 July, 1876, making her seventeen in 1893, the year of Anderson's liaison with her mother. I doubt if a single member of the Council of the S.P.R. could have given the names of Florence Cook's children or indeed knew she had any. Not a single writer for the defence has, to my knowledge, attempted to deal with Anderson's statement regarding the names of these children. If he were able to remember these, then his memory must have been very acute and reliable as names are often peculiarly difficult to recollect. But those who knew him were especially struck by his memory of past events. Mrs. Goldney again, in whose apartment he at one time lived, stated that she had had many occasions for marvelling at his extraordinary and brilliant feats of memory on all sorts of matters (10, p. 391). So much for the "worthlessness" of the Anderson testimony.

If Anderson's memory was so good that he was able to remember the names of Florence Cook's children, and even the age of one of them, it seems to me somewhat unlikely that he would have forgotten the startling story of Crookes's complicity. Indeed, it was this, I think, that made him come to see me "about Sir William Crookes". Whether what Florence told him was true or not is another matter. Certainly, the idea seems to have

<sup>1</sup> Florence's daughter was named "Kathleen" which is often abbreviated to "Katie".

been prevalent that Crookes was not averse to female society, since in a letter (1, p. 113) to D. D. Home, dated 3 November, 1875, he wrote during the Showers imbroglio that he was "getting the reputation of a Don Juan", an expression which I think he would hardly have used if he had simply been suspected of an association with Mary Showers. Whether it was possibly this or his association with Florence Cook that Mr. J. N. Maskelyne meant when he spoke of having "some information from behind the scenes which cannot be published"<sup>1</sup> at the times of the Crookes experiments with Florence Cook (11) we shall never know, but it can hardly be doubted that very damaging rumours were rife since the story of him having been thrashed by Mr. E. Corner (Florence Cook's husband) (1, p. 119) could hardly have been invented by Luxmoore, who mentioned the matter in a private letter.<sup>2</sup> Before closing this brief discussion of the Anderson testimony a word must be said about the very curious story published by the late Mr. C. C. L. Gregory in *Cosmos* (July, 1962, II, pp. 189-192).

It appears that Mr. Gregory knew Mr. Anderson who at one time had given his daughter some additional teaching before taking her examination. Gregory met him for the first time in 1947 and Anderson told him that he used to consort with a Battersea prostitute who told him she was "Katie King", impersonated a spirit and spent week-ends with William Crookes in Paris. I find this tale a little hard to understand. We know that about 1901 Florence Cook was living in Battersea and Anderson, then in his thirties, was posted in India. Is it possible to believe that this lady was actually Florence Cook and Anderson was unaware that he was renewing an association which had blossomed only ten years previously? I find this almost incredible yet, according to Mr. Gregory, she repeated to Anderson the story of the photographs and of the week-ends in Paris. It also seems to me very odd that at his *first* meeting with the father of the young lady he was going to teach he told him the story of

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Mr. R. G. Medhurst for letting me know of the existence of this and other letters by Mr. J. N. Maskelyne on matters concerning Spiritualism.

<sup>2</sup> Perhaps M. M. Sage was hinting at something of the sort when he spoke of Florence Cook as "une petite fille hystérique et vicieuse", and continued by saying that "rares sont ceux dont les facultés ne sont pas un peu troublées par l'autre sexe. C'est là plus qu'un boutade" (See 12, p. 18). F. A. Delmas put the position more bluntly in 1924. Crookes, he thought, lost his head and "il en devient éperdument amoureux" (*Revue de France*, jan.-fév., 1924, p. 138).

the "good class Battersea prostitute" with whom he used to consort "as a young man". There seems so much confusion here that it appears unprofitable to attempt to clear it up. It is, of course, possible that Anderson, when on leave, had heard that Florence had moved to Battersea and had the reputation of being of easy virtue and that the tale he told to Gregory concerned the earlier episode which he told to me and to Mrs. Goldney and did not imply that he was in the habit of meeting Florence at the later Battersea period. If this be so (and Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst seem to agree that the *Cosmos* story does refer to the earlier period) then this version supports the earlier stories alleged to have been told to Anderson about the nature of Florence's mediumship and her relations with Crookes.

In *Fate* for September, 1965, Miss Anita Kohsen, in reviewing Dr. Hans Gerloff's *The Crisis in Parapsychology* (Tittmoning, 1965), has given further information about the tale told by her late husband, Mr. C. C. L. Gregory. She now states that Gregory questioned Anderson about the story, correcting every single contention and pointing out every single inconsistency and incompatibility with the facts. Now, if this be so, it is very odd, to say the least, that in his original accounts in *Cosmos*, Mr. Gregory did not give the results of this cross examination. In any case I doubt if his questions to Anderson would have been of much value since I do not think that either he or his wife knew very much about the case before they read Mr. Hall's book. What Miss Kohsen appears to have forgotten was that a very short summary of the Anderson story was told me in 1922, *twenty-five years* before he is said to have told it to Mr. Gregory. Moreover, she seems to think, like other critics, that Anderson, not willing to admit that "it was all a fabrication" may have "improved" his story, although unfortunately she omits to mention in what these alleged improvements consisted, since to do so might involve her in having to admit that a number of Anderson's statements are now known to be true and related to persons almost entirely unknown to parapsychologists and Spiritualists alike until Mr. Hall disclosed the facts, to their extreme discomfiture. In addition to this Miss Kohsen thinks it probable that Anderson had too much regard for the competence of a savant like Crookes to believe for an instant that the latter could have been taken in by a girl of 15 or 16 (p. 6). It would seem, therefore, that Miss Kohsen and I both find this last supposition to be very improbable although not, perhaps, completely impossible. What Miss Kohsen is therefore doing is to align

herself with the rest of Mr. Hall's critics and flee hastily from the inevitable conclusion. If Crookes were *not* deceived was Katie King therefore genuine? Does Miss Kohsen with her scientific knowledge and experience really believe that and why does she prefer it to the simple, human solution suggested by Mr. Hall and hinted at so broadly by Crookes's contemporaries?

The last serious attack on the Anderson testimony was that sent to *Psychic News* on 14 November, 1964, by Mr. Conan Shaw. This related to the time when Anderson stated that he began his affair with Florence Cook and when he told Mrs. Goldney that he could remember the scene of how it all started as if he were seeing it at the moment of telling her. "There was a large hall," he said, "with a staircase leading upstairs and bending to form a sort of square as it ascended, so that one looked down into the hall from above." From the evidence available at the time Mr. Hall was of the opinion that this incident occurred at Usk Vale in Monmouthshire, a house not far from Oakfield where Kate Cook and Eliza Blackburn were living. In his article Mr. Shaw stated that "a little research brings to light the fact that there was, at this house, no large hall, it was a narrow passage way; the stairway did not bend, it was straight; one could not look down from the landing into the hall, there was no bannister to lean over".<sup>1</sup> This startling revelation regarding the total unreliability, if such it were, of Anderson's memory, led Mr. Shaw to say that the Spiritualists were entitled to ask, "Was Anderson telling lies all the way through?"

Now it is certainly a strange thing that neither Mr. Hall nor any of those who read the manuscript of his book, including myself, ever thought that it was highly desirable to go down to Usk to verify or otherwise Anderson's statement about the present interior of the house. For we now know that Mr. Shaw's story regarding the present internal structure of Usk Vale is true while Anderson's statement seems to relate more satisfactorily to that of Oakfield, where Florence Cook was living in 1891.

Working from the dates as far as we know them it is very difficult indeed to determine whether Anderson was referring to Oakfield, Usk Vale or a combination of the two and I shall not weary the reader with a detailed survey of this troublesome problem concerning which Mr. Hall has made the most careful

<sup>1</sup> I quote from the original article by Mr. Shaw which was not printed in full by *Psychic News*.

examination. In spite of his inquiries, however, it has not been found possible, owing to a variety of circumstances, to determine the most important date of all, namely that on which Capt. Corner and Florence Cook first moved permanently into Usk Vale from Oakfield, which was still their address at Charles Blackburn's death. It would appear, however, from consideration of the mass of material accumulated by Mr. Hall that Usk Vale was the scene of at least part of the affair that Anderson had with Florence Cook. How therefore are we to reconcile his account with the facts?

The first question to be asked is clearly what "the facts" are. Those described by Mr. Shaw refer to the interior of Usk Vale as it is *now* and not necessarily as it *was* when Anderson described it. Now there seems no doubt that alterations and additions have been made to Usk Vale since the Corners were there. It appears that the original staircase may have been replaced by another in order to effect alterations to the first floor which may have been carried out during the occupation of the premises by Messrs. J. A. Howard and D. A. Jones in the 1920's since the formation and construction of the new staircase strongly suggests that it dates from this decade. These alterations would change the upper design of the house and the lower hall since the new staircase is now to the left of the front door and ascends from a kind of recess. Thus, since so far it has proved impossible to trace the builders who made the alterations (although a local resident who remembers alterations were made has been interviewed), we are left with a curious situation. If Oakfield was the house to which Anderson was referring then the interior can be said to correspond in great part with the description but on account of the dates this does not seem very likely. If, on the other hand, Usk Vale was the house, then its *present* condition does not correspond with the account left by Anderson, although it is very possible that it did so at the time that he was there.

Since Mr. Shaw printed information concerning Usk Vale in *Psychic News* Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst have reviewed the situation in the *Journal* of the S.P.R. for September, 1965, but I cannot say I am impressed by their conclusions which seem to me to be somewhat insecurely based. They seem to think that no alterations have been made to Usk Vale, whereas the fact is that such alterations were made prior to 1940 and at least one of these can be seen from a photograph of the *back* of the house whereas they reproduce only a photograph of the front. Moreover, they print a report of two observers who had been inside Oakfield

and who state that it is not possible to imagine anyone above being able to look into the hall without actually "hanging over suspended by the ankles". This last touch has clearly been inserted to show that Anderson's story of how Florence Cook looked down into the hall while leaning over the banisters must be untrue. Thus, they say that it is evidence that the episode described by Anderson "must have been largely imagined or invented" (op. cit., p. 145).

In their haste, however, to prove the unreliability of Anderson's memory, they seem to me either to have forgotten or ignored a vital part of the story. Anderson said that "one looked down into the hall from above". At Oakfield the stairs are on the right and ascend to a sort of half-landing extending horizontally across the back of the hall. It is from this half-landing that an observer is able to look down into the hall and one of my informants has done so.

Finally, Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst in their latest report seem to agree with Mr. Conan Shaw in his view of the inaccuracies that have been brought to light by suggesting that some persons may choose to disbelieve the whole affair from beginning to end (op. cit., p. 146) and they conclude with the extraordinary statement that what is certain is that Anderson's whole story could be omitted altogether without affecting one way or the other our judgment of the value and validity of Sir William Crookes's testimony on physical phenomena and of Florence Cook's mediumship in particular.

The aim of these critics of Anderson's statements is clear. It is to try to show that his memory was quite unreliable, that his account of the scene of the first intimacy was imaginary and that his story of the fraudulent spirit photography was, as they put it, an "absurdity". If the memories of these events can be proved false then, they think, his memory of what Florence Cook told him about Crookes was probably false also. They conveniently forget about the names of Florence Cook's children and the exact age of one of them. We are asked to assume, therefore, that the man whose memory was so acute as to recollect minor details of this sort was not at all reliable when he said he remembered so important a fact as the alleged relationship between Crookes and Florence Cook. It does not seem to me to be very likely, but everyone is entitled to his own opinion but only, I venture to submit, after examining all the facts and not ignoring some of the most important.

Among the various reviews and notices of Mr. Hall's book which are especially critical are those by Dr. I. Stevenson, an American psychiatrist, Dr. R. H. Thouless, a former President of the S.P.R. and a Member of its Council, Mr. George Zorab, the Dutch parapsychologist, and Dr. Hans Gerloff, a German writer on occultism. This last named author has actually written an entire book<sup>1</sup> on the matter where he has made some violent attacks on most of those who doubt the genuine character of Florence Cook's phenomena and those of other physical mediums. The late Dr. Nandor Fodor, an American parapsychologist, told him that my attitude was, he thought, due to having been "constantly suppressed" by my father. There is not a word of truth in any of this, but the idea pleased both Dr. Fodor and Dr. Gerloff. Parapsychologists are apt to believe and repeat any fairy stories if it suits them to do so. Another difficulty in dealing with some of the criticisms advanced is that the writers are not sufficiently acquainted with the period or with the relevant literature for their points to have more than limited value.

I now propose to take a few examples of this method of attack and show how, had they known the facts, they would have never raised the questions on which they lay stress. In his paper (13, pp. 215 ff.) Dr. Stevenson discusses the question whether Florence Cook was sometimes genuine and sometimes not and gives the seizure of 1880 as lending support to a theory of this kind. He states that Florence Cook had disrobed down to her corsets, "but she had not put on 'spirit clothes' which would have additionally indicated conscious fraud". In his reply to Dr. Stevenson (14, pp. 57 ff.) Mr. Hall pointed out that the enquirers spied what seemed to be a corset "beneath the diaphanous robes of ghosthood", and then Dr. Stevenson took refuge in the fact that this discovery was made at a previous sitting to that at which the seizure took place and that the account of the later sitting makes no mention of any spirit clothes. Unfortunately Dr. Stevenson took his information from Dr. Fodor's *Encyclopaedia of Psychic Science* which stated that on the occasion of the seizure it was said that Florence Cook was enveloped in white drapery when Sir George Sitwell grabbed her. According to Fodor "this, however, may have been an optical illusion of the darkness". Now, since Dr. Stevenson did not know what contemporary documents existed he published this suggestion by Fodor and therefore submitted the opinion

<sup>1</sup> *The Crisis in Parapsychology* (Tittmoning, 1965).

that there existed "a very good possibility that the 'diaphanous robes' were an optical illusion" (15, p. 129).

At this stage in the fairy story Dr. Stevenson was apparently warned by Mr. George Zorab<sup>1</sup> that he had found a translation in a German periodical of the testimony of one E. Dawson Rogers who was present and who said that he saw the figure wearing a "long gown which extended over her head like a veil". Mr. Zorab went on to say that "a lady sitter who escorted Florence Cook from the room insisted that Florence had nothing on but her corsets and flannel petticoat". What are the *facts* as opposed to "optical illusions" and other fancies?

Edmund Dawson Rogers was born in 1823. In the 1840's he was a well-known provincial journalist and in 1865 became interested in Spiritualism and became friends with the Everitts who were active in Spiritualist propaganda. He attended sittings with Home and Mrs. Marshall and in 1873 moved to London, where he at once got in the thick of the Movement and helped to found the paper *Light* in 1881 on which he acted as business controller, later taking over the whole conduct of the journal.

On the death of the President of the British National Association of Spiritualists, Rogers was elected President of that organization. Prior to that honour he had become a member of the first Council of the S.P.R. He died in 1910 and was acknowledged by all to be a man of sterling qualities, leaving behind him, as my old friend David Gow put it, "a record of fearless devotion to the truth as he had realized it".

Such was the man who in his testimony stated that the figure appeared attired in white robes. The white drapery covered the head, face and shoulders and it reached to the heels. Rogers did not quite like what he saw, as he apparently did not think like Dr. Fodor and Dr. Stevenson following him that he was suffering an optical illusion. He threw up the veil to see if underneath it was Mrs. Corner or not. Being a good believing Spiritualist, he thought that Mrs. Corner, whom he found

<sup>1</sup> Mr. Zorab is apparently of the opinion that there may have been something "paranormal" about Katie King and the later materialization, Marie. He is impressed by the testimony of Dr. R. Friese who in his *Stimmen aus dem Reich der Geister* published in 1879, describes his experiences with Florence Cook. Friese, who was even more credulous than Aksakov, was lucky during his English visit. He went to Hudson's studio and was provided with an excellent spirit photograph of Pauline Seigner, his friend from spirit-land who had helped him so devotedly in writing his book. (See G. Zorab, "Foreign Comments on Florence Cook's Mediumship" [*Proceedings*, S.P.R., 1964, LIV, pp. 176-7].)

underneath the veil, was unconscious and therefore totally guiltless of any deception. But other testimony had to be heard. Dr. Stevenson quotes it, having been told it by Mr. Zorab. He tells us that "a lady sitter" after the seizure escorted Florence from the room and insisted that she had nothing on but her corsets and petticoat. Neither Mr. Zorab nor Dr. Stevenson has told the reader who this lady was. She happened to be Mrs. Agnes Maltby, who died in 1915 and who had been associated with Spiritualism since 1869. She was an official of the British National Association of Spiritualists and her daughters are constantly mentioned as contributing vocal entertainment at various meetings. It was, I think, hardly likely that Mrs. Maltby would not have understood the significance of the drapery, and I suggest that she might have known where it went after Florence was got into the cabinet. Sitwell himself said that when the figure was removed from his grasp drapery was covering it.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. van Buch thought that Florence had been able to stuff it in her drawers, but Mr. Rogers thought that this was impossible, although he does not seem to have considered the possibility that it might have gone into those of Mrs. Maltby. Had Florence been a genuine materializing medium, it might be thought that after such a distressing incident further sittings soon afterwards would have been postponed, or had they taken place would not have been very successful. This, however, was not the case. Mrs. Corner performed again, although with some reluctance, on the very same evening and a full-form materialization was again observed.

From the above it will be seen how difficult it is to deal with critics who are so gullible that they believe the stories published by Nandor Fodor but who have been either unwilling or unable to consult the original contemporary documents as Mr. Hall has tried to do. The same kind of muddled criticism is present in so many of the attacks on the case for the prosecution

<sup>1</sup>Note that the figure had to be forcibly removed, just as it had when Volckman seized it previously. Psychic "laws" are apt to change according as to whether or not they suit the Spiritualistic theories. The literature has accounts of mediums whose full-forms wander about while their mediums lie half dissolved like dismembered mummies, sometimes with their legs missing. In the 1880's one sitter with Mrs. H. D. Miller recognized the figure as her mother, seized it in a loving embrace and could not be separated. In this case the materialized body dissolved leaving its hands and wrists with the sitter. These marvels are still going on to-day. Cf. the Lijs case in Holland in the 1930's and Tarchini's paper on the subject in *Luce et Ombra* (Genn.-Febr., 1947, pp. 44ff.). I shall return to this subject later.

that to expose them seems almost a waste of time. Amongst these the criticism (9) of Mr. Hall's book by Dr. R. H. Thouless is especially noteworthy. Part of it is, to me at least, unintelligible, and it is clear that his knowledge of the whole Katie King episode is of the slenderest. Mr. Hall, compelled as he was to condense and summarize the evidence, was unable to quote extensively from the mass of material at his disposal and often, perhaps unwisely, made statements for which he gave no evidence, but which could have been substantiated from easily accessible sources. Thus, in discussing what Crookes thought about Katie King, he stated that Crookes testified to the actuality, paranormal nature and separate existence of that materialized form. Dr. Thouless, however, thinks that Crookes was not satisfied with anything about Katie King, except that Florence Cook was not cheating, that Katie King's form was separate from that of the medium and that Mr. Hall's version of what Crookes thought was not a quotation from Crookes. This is quite true: Mr. Hall's words were a summing up of Crookes's view taken not from a single source, but from a variety of sources, some of which were clearly quite unknown to his critics. For instance, in his close acquaintance with Katie, both in the séance room and in his own house, Crookes said that he treated her quite clearly as a visitor from the Other World. He used to have conversations with her about that World from which she came and put many questions to her, the answers to which would have been of interest to those still on earth. Unfortunately the replies were hardly satisfactory, since Katie told him that it was forbidden to give such information.

What Crookes was supposed to be doing during these interviews and what he was supposed to believe about the lady interviewed is for Dr. Thouless to decide.

Lenore Fitzwarren, one of the full-form materializations manifesting through Miss Mary Showers, gave much more information about herself. Writing to Sir Charles Isham she stated that she resided "in Jupiter, and am very happy, though thoroughly under the dominion of 'King Saul', who is the ruling power there". She went on to say that the King was teaching her to fly gracefully but she was inclined to drop her feathers about.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The interest in the possibility of communicating with intelligences apart from that of the mediums was obviously considerable among thoughtful scientific men. For example, in 1880 G. J. Romanes said that to observe such a phenomenon, if true, he "would go to the North Pole, or anywhere else on the planet". (Letter to Mr. T. Rule. Unpublished.)

Other points that have much worried the critics is what I may call the mysteries of the drapery and the photographs. Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst have a good deal to say about the drapery with which the materialized forms were so often dressed. According to a letter from Lord Rayleigh to his mother, dated 3 May, 1874, and quoted by them (1, p. 107), Crookes thought that in the case of Miss Showers she might have been "got hold of by spirits" who perhaps supplied the dress, although he gives no reason why Crookes should have held such an odd view. Having quoted the letter, these two authors later (op. cit., pp. 134ff.) discuss the matter and state that because the photographs of the form show creases and folds, the modern reader might suppose that the phenomena were fraudulent and ask why this "obvious fraud" was not apparent to the investigators at the time. Indeed, they continue, the fact is that Crookes and his colleagues would have been disconcerted had they *not* seen creases and folds, since they held the view that the "spirit drapery" was indistinguishable from cloth or similar material. Now I can understand the view that these draperies were materialized, just as Katie's lungs and Lillie's rumbling bowels were materialized. I can also understand the view that Eva C.'s phantoms were associated with "draperies" of the same kind, only in this case pieces were rarely left behind except in unfortunate circumstances such as when it was my duty to remove pieces of paper from the medium's mouth. What I do not understand is how Crookes and his colleagues could have held these strange views of the origin of these draperies and *at the same time* believe that they occasionally "were all of a very poor kind of cotton, greatly adulterated in the manufacture" (op. cit., p. 135) a feature of Spiritualism ridiculed in *Punch* (15 August, 1874, p. 65) where in addition it is stated that the adulteration was a dressing of lime "in the Manchester fashion". Similarly some drapery when cut off revealed the fact that it was real Indian muslin, machine hemmed and chain stitched. These features seem to me to be as curious as the equally strange appearance of one of Eva C.'s materializations in which what might have been the first four letters of the title of the French journal *Le Miroir* were seen at the back of one of the white objects near her head. This suggestive appearance was soon explained away by believers in spite of the highly suspicious appearance of some of the heads exhibited which closely resembled photographs published in the *Le Miroir*, including the head of Poincaré, with a patch over his nose and other alterations which, unfortunately, did not include the tie which was recognizable on account of its horizontal stripes.

It is not for him who doubts the paranormal nature of these strange facts to explain them. In the case of Florence Cook the "spirit drapery" disappeared when Mrs. Maltby led the medium into the cabinet. In the case of her friend Frank Herne, his luck was out. When he was seized in 1875 and the gas turned up, he was found clothed in about two yards of stiffened muslin, wound round his head and hanging down as far as his thigh. Apparently those present were not edified by this remarkable spectacle, and may have come to the same conclusion as Dr. Mason in *Maud Blount* who, when asked to describe the beautiful face at the opening of Mrs. Pugsby's Punch and Judy cabinet, said that what he saw was "old Corkscrew, a little over-powdered, and with half a yard of sixpenny calico tied over her chignon" (op. cit., p. 27), an opinion which would probably have been shared by D. D. Home who, in his *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism*, wrote the most critical account known of the full-form materializations of the time. Moreover, although we are assured that these odd *qualities* had been observed in the draperies, their *behaviour* appeared to be equally odd. For sometimes, after pieces had been cut off, they remained materialized, so that they could be examined and the adulteration determined, while at other times when the sitters had placed the treasured pieces in sealed envelopes, the said envelopes were found to be empty when opened after the sitters had returned home. Apparently, also, the material varied at different séances. Stainton Moses described it as coarse calico while Florence Marryat (16, p. 143) said it was sometimes like "long cloth" or "mull muslin or jaconet" but most often it was like "thick cotton net"<sup>1</sup> or Brussels net as it was described in the case of Miss Showers.

It will be seen how very curious the process of materialization seems to have been. One day the substance is like calico, the next jaconet and the next cotton net. Some pieces when cut off remain "materialized", can be examined and found to be "adulterated": other pieces "dematerialize" when enclosed in sealed envelopes. On one occasion the substance appeared to pass through matter as when in 1872 it was seen to pass through the curtains (17, p. 52). Further, the material was not always cotton, calico or canvas. For example, Miss J. H. Douglas of 81 South Audley Street, London, who knew a great deal of what

<sup>1</sup> Mull muslin was a fabric used in the nineteenth century. It was soft and thin, but not silky and finer than nainsook. Jaconet was similar, being a thin cotton textile, Mr. Tapp on one occasion describing it as like fine canvas or bunting.

was going on, got hold of a piece one day and took it along to Messrs. Howell and James, the silk mercers of 5, 7 and 9 Regent Street and asked them to match it. They said that they could not and that they thought it might be of Chinese manufacture. Perhaps Captain Elgie Corner had been to Shanghai before he sailed there in the good ship *M. A. Dixon* in December, 1875. He might, indeed, have brought Florence back a little present from China. But sometimes even this did not suffice. One day at a séance Mrs. Cook observed with horror, so she says, that Katie King appeared to be dressed in a garment that she herself had made for Florence Cook to wear. So after the séance and before Florence Cook had left the room she hurried upstairs and found the said garment, which had evidently been unfolded and hastily replaced. Coming downstairs she immediately demanded a further sitting, at which Katie King again appeared, confessing that this time she had used things belonging to the medium to save herself the trouble of materializing them. Such are some of the mysteries connected with the spirit draperies.

Whatever we may think of these problems to-day, it is a mistake to suppose, as some critics seem to have done, that to the people living at the time it was all quite simple. For example, the editor of *The Spiritualist*, Mr. W. H. Harrison, who perhaps was a little more critical than many of his readers, was sorely troubled, as he had to admit, that all attempts to pierce the mystery of the source whence the draperies came were conflicting and that he was unable to give even an approximately satisfactory answer, or even speculate about it. He consoled himself, however, by thinking that the spirits have the power of either duplicating the dress of the medium or not, just as they please.

The thorny problem of the draperies is not the only one which troubled our ancestors, as they still seem to trouble some of us to-day. What happened to the food partaken by the full-forms was also a matter for speculation. We do not know. I think, whether Katie King had tea or supper with Sir William Crookes when he had Florence Cook to stay with him at Mornington Road and when Katie collected his children round her to tell them stories of her adventures in India. Certainly in other cases the materialized forms much appreciated a good meal. One of them in 1876 enjoyed a substantial repast of well-buttered tea-cakes; and Florence Maple, the full-form appearing with Miss Mary Showers, much enjoyed half a biscuit and a piece of sugar candy in 1874, an appreciation shared by another of Miss Showers's

materializations, Lenore Fitzwarren, who enjoyed a bon-bon filled with a sort of liqueur which Sir Charles Isham had thoughtfully provided for her. The problem of what happened to these dainties disturbed some of the more critical observers, since possibly they had a few qualms about the digested portions entering their own physical systems after the figures had dematerialized and returned what they had borrowed from the sitters and from the medium. None of these questions, however, seems to have bothered Sir William Crookes, or perhaps he thought it wiser not to discuss them, since critics might have suggested to him other details, as embarrassing to him as perplexing to themselves.

The question of the photographs in relation to Florence Cook seems to have been discussed by the defence mainly, I think, because they believe that they can show the unreliability of the Anderson testimony by pointing out the somewhat confused statements that he made regarding them.

Mr. Anderson first mentioned photographs to me at my interview with him in 1922. He then stated that Florence Cook and her daughters made a great many spirit photographs (6, p. 136). We will call this statement "D". In his conversation with Mrs. Goldney on 23 November, 1949, he told her that Florence had told him about how the spirit photographs were taken and he added that this must have obviously involved the co-operation of a scientist and therefore Crookes must have been in it (6, p. 138). This statement we will call "G.1".

Mrs. Goldney was not clear, as well might happen, about some of the details Anderson told her, but she thought that ultra-violet light was used, producing a dim, hazy, phosphorescent effect. In his final statement to Mrs. Goldney, Mr. Salter and myself on 4 December, 1949, Anderson said that Florence told him that a beam of electric light was directed through a prism on to a wall in which a slot was cut to admit the violet and ultra-violet rays; these, after passing through a slot or lens, fell on a pedestal on which she herself was requested to stand, concealed at first by a heavy curtain. When the lights were out in the séance room the curtains were silently pulled aside and at Crookes's invitation the cameras were directed on her. Sometimes she was draped to represent some personage: sometimes she was clad only in a chemise and found it rather a chilly performance. It was said that some of the sitters were able to distinguish a dim

glow and possible outline as of a spirit in the corner but of course the cameras took a well-focused picture of her (7, p. 95). This account we will call "G.2".

There seems little doubt that Anderson, who was quite uninterested in Spiritualism, was merely relating in "D", "G.1" and "G.2" what he remembered or thought he remembered about various photographic experiments with Florence Cook. She might have told him a number of stories and it would indeed have been remarkable if he had managed to distinguish the one from the other and give a concise account of each. Having no interest whatever in the matter it is noteworthy that he remembered anything about them at all. Dr. Thouless's remarks in his attack on Mr. Hall's book (9, p. 129) show that he has so little knowledge of the photographic work in which Florence Cook took part that they can consequently be ignored.

In the spring of 1872 the first famous British spirit photographer made his appearance in the shape of Mr. F. A. Hudson, who for some years was the subject of violent controversy. Some critics, including the editor of *The Spiritualist*, maintained that many of his results were fakes, while others stated that they could not possibly be fraudulent since the clearly recognizable features of their deceased relatives had appeared on the plates. Now Florence Cook could hardly have failed to know of Hudson, since her friend Frank Herne, another physical medium of the period already mentioned, was an associate of Hudson, together with Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Guppy. Mr. Herne's performances became so obviously fraudulent that even the ultra-credulous Benjamin Coleman described him as "thoroughly unreliable"; and the scenes at Liverpool in 1875, which I have already described, confirmed others in the same opinion. Even before 1875 it was said in *The Medium and Daybreak* that according to his own confession he was nothing but a professional impostor willing to make money under false pretences, but his statements were not considered of much value by the believers who were furious at a story he told in 1873 of how he actually knew that the medium's agents were accustomed to buy the masks used by their protégées when showing the "spirit-faces" in the Punch and Judy cabinet. The masks, he said, were bought in Houndsditch, in which many toy and fancy goods shops were established in 1874.

Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst (1, pp. 49 ff.) deal with Herne's activities, but clearly show themselves troubled by

Florence's close association with this notorious rogue, by the support of her family and by his own participation in the development of her marvellous mediumship. They are even more cautious in letting their readers know some of the details of the performances of Mr. and Mrs. J. W. Fletcher, some of whose exploits were described by Mr. Hall. Mr. Fletcher was on the Council of the British National Association of Spiritualists when he was in England in the 1880's and was evidently well acquainted with the Cooks, since Kate, Florence's sister, helped him in one of his fraudulent séances which was described at the trial. This was the person who received the eulogies of Alfred Russel Wallace, who sat with a great many mediums of the period and who was unable, as it seems to me, to understand what constituted valid evidence in parapsychology.<sup>1</sup>

Another of Florence's close friends and associates was Mrs. W. G. Bassett, whose performances are described in the press of that period, but who came to grief in 1874. This lady used to sit with Florence in joint séances and so she was able to testify to Katie King being independent of her medium, since while Katie was trotting around outside the cabinet, Mrs. Bassett declared that her hands were on Florence's head inside, as Florence lay with her head in Mrs. Bassett's lap. Mrs. Bassett herself seems to have been captivated by the charms of Frank Herne since she later married him. Presumably they understood one another very well, being, as it were, in the same line of business. But it is somewhat disturbing to find them such good friends of Florence Cook, a fact which could hardly have escaped the attention of Sir William Crookes, although how he explained it to himself we do not know.

In the early days of spirit photography the photographers had believed that they themselves could not be their own "mediums" and it was therefore thought that other mediums had to be borrowed, so as to provide the "power" for getting the psychic effects on the plates. Mr. Hudson, having to look round for assistants, very sensibly hit upon Mr. Herne as the principal medium of a little group of helpers through whose kindness the

<sup>1</sup> Fletcher returned to the United States after the disasters in England. It was probably this Fletcher who, according to an American source, presented some most original "phenomena" including the pouring from a champagne bottle, suspended by a wire from a chandelier, of gallon after gallon of wine into a small tub on the table without the tub overflowing. This highly spiritual phenomenon was very popular and must have certainly been somewhat spectacular.

plates could be prepared, ready for the appearance of the dupes who flocked to his studio at Holloway. There they were able to obtain photographs of their dear ones who, through Mr. Herne's powerful mediumship, very kindly obliged and were promptly recognized by their relations. Amongst this little band of helpful collaborators enlisted by Mr. Hudson were Mr. Williams and Miss Florence Cook, who clearly was not averse in 1872 from helping her friend Herne and doing a good turn to a fellow performer in the same business, who might perhaps himself do her a good turn one day if she found herself in difficulties.

In *Light* (Winter, 1964, p. 219) I wrote a letter saying that I hoped to say something about the photograph from the Horace Leaf collection reproduced by Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst as Plate III in their paper (1). My letter was apparently sent to them before publication, since in the same issue of *Light* (p. 219) they say that "of possible relevance is the photograph taken at Hudson's on Saturday, 6 April, 1872" and later that "it is by no means impossible that this is a photograph by Hudson, mistakenly attributed to Crookes by whoever passed the collection of photographs to Mr. Leaf" (p. 220).

Now it is of course impossible to say that this photograph was *not* taken by Crookes. All that we can say is that the *chair* is either the actual one used by Hudson in his studio or a duplicate of it. It is instantly recognizable by anyone who has examined Hudson's photographs taken at this period and this particular photograph was among a collection of Hudson's original prints that I acquired some years ago. In my opinion Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst are quite right in their view that it was the photograph taken at Hudson's in April, 1872. At this period Hudson was producing *cartes de visite* and this specimen was No. 27 of the series of which I have several examples.

At that time the Guppys were supporting Mr. Hudson in his work and were not averse from advertising Florence Cook in her developing stages. It was at some time later that Mrs. Guppy, who was apparently very angry at the success of other physical mediums, was said to have engineered a veritable campaign against some of them. According to Mr. Nelson Holmes, another medium with none too good a reputation, Mrs. Guppy had threatened to arrange that some of her friends should attend a séance with Florence Cook and throw some vitriol in the face of the spirit "hoping thereby to destroy for ever the handsome features of Miss Florrie Cook . . ." (1, p. 59).

In quoting this revealing plot Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst seem to me to have failed to notice one important feature. Mrs. Guppy clearly seems to have thought that by disfiguring Katie King she would destroy Florrie's pretty face. The identity of the two was assumed and I, for one, would not care to dispute the opinion of so well informed a contemporary of Florence as Mrs. Elizabeth Guppy.<sup>1</sup>

So far as I know Florence Cook's introduction to photography was her connection with Hudson through her friend Frank Herne. It was later that her own phenomena attracted sufficient attention to make observers want to photograph them. Thus in May, 1873, four special sittings were held at Hackney to try to get pictures of Katie King and of these the most successful was on 7 May. Those present at this sitting were Mrs. Corner and her daughter Caroline, Mr. J. C. Luxmoore, Mr. G. R. Tapp and Mr. W. H. Harrison. The statement that there were strict test conditions need not be taken very seriously.

A second series of sittings for photographs was also held at Hackney late in May, 1873, and it is with these sittings that much confusion has arisen which I hope I may be able to clarify. The trouble appears to be partly due to the fact that the famous photograph of Katie King with her hand in that of Dr. Gully<sup>2</sup> was supposed to have been taken by Crookes at Mornington Road in 1874, whereas it was, I think, taken at Hackney by Harrison during the second series there in 1873.

<sup>1</sup>I am, of course, aware that this action on the part of Mrs. Guppy's agent would not be accepted by the believer as evidence that Katie King and Florence Cook were, at times at least, the same person. Any injury inflicted on the materialization is supposed to be received by the entranced medium but I do not intend to discuss this question here except to say that I doubt if Mrs. Guppy had any such ideas when mentioning her infamous proposition. Alfred Russel Wallace wrote to *Light* on 7 October, 1882, on the question of the forms, when seized, being found to be the mediums and a most amusing comment on his remarks was published in the issue for 21 October, p. 472.

Later, when Mrs. Guppy's active life as a medium had ceased, she kept up her interest in the subject since, on an occasion when Mr. J. N. Maskelyne had advertised some conjuring apparatus for sale, she came to his house to have a look at it. Over a glass of wine Maskelyne asked her how the spirits were getting on to which she replied by bursting out laughing and giving him "a knowing wink" (18).

<sup>2</sup>See the frontispiece to H. Price's *Fifty Years of Psychological Research* (London, 1939) and p. 130. Another photograph said to have been taken in Dr. Gully's presence is reproduced on p. 232 of E. E. Fournier d'Albe's *New Light on Immortality* (London, 1908).

Mr. Trevor Hall, when writing *The Spiritualists* (pp. 40-41), apparently accepted the theory current at the time that this photograph was taken by Crookes and at the same time he agreed with the opinions of Mr. G. Hayes that four photographs of Katie King which he found among his father's paper were similarly examples of Crookes's work (19). I am, however, unable to agree with these authorities.

In the second series of photographic sessions at Hackney, Dr. Gully and members of the Withall family were present. So was Dr. Maurice Davies, but I do not know if his account of the events has been preserved. At one of these sittings it is said<sup>1</sup> that four photographs were taken; and in the same year Mr. Enmore Jones showed "a full-length photograph of the spirit Katie, taken while illuminated by the magnesium light, and holding the hand of Dr. J. M. Gully" (op. cit., p. 361).

Now, if the reproduction in Price's book be examined it will be seen that the background shows features so similar to those published by Mr. G. Hayes that it can hardly be denied that they were taken in the same place. For instance, note the falling curtain flap just behind and to the right of Katie's head in the Price reproduction and in Nos. 1 and 4 of the Hayes photographs, together with the jagged edge made by the same flap as seen in Price and Hayes' Plate 4. The texture and pattern also of the cabinet curtain are so similar in Price and Hayes' Plate 3 as to leave little doubt that it is the same cabinet. Again, in Hayes' Plate 1 Katie appears to be resting against the shoulder of the gentleman to the left, and I suggest that this sitter is Mr. J. C. Luxmoore since in both the two series of sittings in May, 1873, Katie was in the habit of leaning on that gentleman's shoulder. Indeed, in his account of the sitting when such a photograph was taken Luxmoore stated that in one of the photographs one half of his own face could be seen at one side of the picture. This can be compared with Hayes' Plate 1 where one half of the face of a sitter on whom Katie seems to be leaning is out of focus and somewhat obscured.

It is for these reasons that I suggest that the famous picture of Dr. Gully holding Katie's hand was not taken by Crookes at Mornington Road but by Harrison at Hackney in 1873. Moreover, Dr. Gully himself when discussing what was apparently this very

photograph stated (17, p. 54) that it was taken by magnesium light, which corresponds with the method used by Harrison.

Before passing on to consider briefly the Anderson testimony on Florence Cook's work in spirit photography it may be of interest to say something about the fate of the photographs taken by Crookes at Mornington Road. Mr. Hall quoted both Mr. G. Hayes and Mr. H. Wyndham on the destruction of these plates. Mr. Wyndham declared that Crookes destroyed the negatives, while Mr. Hayes said that these were destroyed after Crookes's death by persons who considered that all memorials of his devotion to psychical research would damage his scientific standing. If we are to believe the testimony of Mr. W. T. Stead (and I see no reason to doubt his credibility in such a matter) there is no truth in the statements by Hayes and Wyndham. On one occasion Stead asked Crookes what had happened to the originals and he replied that they "were accidentally destroyed some years ago" (20, p. 128).

From what we know of Florence Cook's activities in the spirit photography business it is far from clear to what she was referring in her statement to Anderson. The latter, who was not a photographic expert, seems to have been repeating what he thought he remembered he was told on a subject in which he had no interest and probably regarded as of little importance. From what he said it seems to me quite possible that Crookes, an expert in photographic work, was making some experiments in ultra-violet photography, such as W. H. F. Talbot had described in his famous book *The Pencil of Nature* (London, 1844). For this purpose it is possible that Florence and her daughters had acted as subjects and that Florence, not in the least understanding the purpose of the experiment, believed them to be "spirit photographs" similar to those she had helped to produce in earlier days in Hudson's studio.

It was to be expected that Crookes kept himself informed of what was going on in spirit photography and among his effects after his death some of his children found a packet of such photographs which they did not know what to do with as, for some strange reason, they apparently did not think of sending them to the S.P.R. They handed them over to Mr. G. F. Whybrow who approached the national press which had no use for them and it seems that Mr. Whybrow did not ask the S.P.R. if they could suggest a place for them unless he did so and they have subsequently been destroyed. Had they been preserved it

<sup>1</sup> *The Spiritualist*, 1 June, 1873, p. 217.

is possible that they might have been the photographs that Florence Cook had mentioned to Anderson.

If we consider all the attacks made upon the testimony of Anderson regarding his association with Florence Cook, it is plain, I think, how very unsuccessful they have been. Some of the theories for the origin of the facts described by him do not seem to help those who have tried to discredit him. For example, Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst (6, p. 134) think they have not far to look for the source of some of the information. They hazard the assumption that Florence Marryat *might* have known a good deal and *might* have told Anderson. This, however, does not, as far as I can see, even suggest that Anderson's memory cannot be relied on. It merely suggests that he remembered what Florence Marryat told him at about the same period or even before. I find it difficult to understand why these critics prefer to think that he remembered dull matters told him on chance occasions by Florence Marryat rather than what Florence Cook told him in much more memorable circumstances.

It is true that, at least on one matter, Mr. Anderson's memory does appear to be at fault and this is, one might have thought, not at all surprising. I refer to his statements regarding Mr. Charles Blackburn. In his statement of 4 December, 1949, he said that Florence told him that she had two sisters living near Usk "with a wealthy old man named Blackburn, with whom they used to have séances, fraudulent Florrie said, and were seeking to influence him to bequeath his money to them. Whether they succeeded or not I do not know" (7, p. 94). Now in his statement of 4 December, 1949, Anderson said that he thought it was probably January 1893, that he was invited to Usk and the affair began. It certainly could not have been later since he said that it was at the end of 1893 that he went out to India.<sup>1</sup> Mr. Blackburn died on 15 January, 1891, and by February of the same year both Florence and her husband knew the contents of his will and that Florence received nothing. Yet Anderson's story is that he got the impression from Florence that Blackburn was alive and her sisters' attempts to get hold of his money were actually going on. Had Florence told him that she had two sisters living near Usk in a house bought by a wealthy old man named Blackburn with whom they held séances and had been

<sup>1</sup> He sailed on the P. & O. S.S. *Shannon* which left Marseilles for Bombay on 18 November, 1893.

rewarded for their services under his will, the statement would have been correct, as has been proved by Mr. Hall.

There seems little doubt that in this case Anderson's memory was at fault and that he either misunderstood what Florence Cook told him or, after half a century, failed to recollect the precise details, in which he could not have taken much interest. To stress minor mistakes of this kind seems to me petty, especially since these critics now attacking him had, I suspect, never heard of Blackburn or his bequests till the facts were made known to them through Mr. Hall's work on the wills and codicils. But, however we may assess Anderson's memory, one thing is certain. William Crookes was moving in a corrupt and shabby world and was sometimes keeping dubious company. Yet there was little that was doubtful about Florence Cook's mediumistic friends. Their quality was very clear.

We must now pass to the story of Annie Eva Fay and her relations with Crookes, Myers, Sidgwick and Lord Rayleigh. The history of this lady is important since it reveals the extraordinary credulity of these distinguished persons when confronted by a really skilful vaudeville performer.

## II

### ANNIE EVA FAY

Although Mr. Hall does not discuss the relation between Annie Eva Fay,<sup>1</sup> the American vaudeville performer and "spiritual medium", and Myers, Crookes, Sidgwick and Rayleigh, the story of this remarkable affair can hardly be avoided since it throws much light on the mentality and general outlook of the early psychical researchers in England besides illustrating the behaviour of Crookes when dealing both with mediums and with his own colleagues.

Annie Eva Fay was born in Southington, Trumbull County, Ohio, and early in life she became interested in theosophy and mysticism. At one time she said that she became Mme Blavatsky's pupil, living with her and helping her in her work. When the arrangement ended Mme Blavatsky presented her with a handsome shawl which she was accustomed to wear when giving her stage performances.

Having to earn her own living, she went on the stage primarily as a mind-reader, and it was such that brought her fame until she gave her last performance in Milwaukee in 1924. Before taking up a vaudeville career she had given "séances" and was considered to be a medium. It seems clear that her claims were adjusted to her audience. When dealing with Spiritualists, she claimed mediumistic powers and when performing on the music-hall stage she let the audience be the judge, an attitude adopted by the Piddingtons when performing their mentalist act in London in connection with the B.B.C. One of her earlier assistants was a young conjurer, George W. Stock, who acted with her in her performances.

Before leaving for Europe on her 1874 tour Miss Fay found herself in a difficulty from which she extricated herself without undue publicity. One of her acquaintances in Boston happened

<sup>1</sup> Although her advertisements describe her as "Miss" she is usually called "Mrs." by contemporary writers.

to be a supposed spiritual medium, Mrs. J. M. Carpenter, whose husband lectured on various psychological subjects. Apparently Mrs. Carpenter attended one evening a séance Miss Fay was giving and accidentally discovered how the various tie tests Miss Fay was doing were accomplished. She told Miss Fay, who admitted that she was right, but it seems Mrs. Carpenter told others who thereupon asked Miss Fay to leave and cease her performances. Not only did Mrs. Carpenter tell her friends but she actually invited a number of prominent Spiritualists to her home and gave a demonstration of just how the various tricks were done. Confirmation of Mrs. Carpenter's statements was later given by Mr. B. Boardman who, on a certain occasion, was invited to sit with Miss Fay in the cabinet, exactly as I was invited to do some thirty-eight years later. Through a mistake Mr. Boardman's blindfold was imperfectly adjusted and he was able to observe Miss Fay deputizing for the spirits, who appeared to be absent on this occasion.

It seems possible that before her arrival in Scotland early in 1874 she had been in contact with Mr. John Burns, the editor of *The Medium and Daybreak*, since on arrival she claimed to possess mediumistic gifts and stated that she had possessed these since childhood (*The Medium and Daybreak*, 12 June, 1874, p. 374). After giving some performances in Glasgow she arrived in London early in June and started by giving private sittings before opening her real show at the Hanover Square Rooms. Her act was under the management of Jerome A. Paddock with the séance arranged by Col. H. C. Fay of Ohio. The advertisement of her performance is now before me and she is described as "the celebrated indescribable phenomenon" giving "entertainments comprising light and dark séances every day". There is no suggestion that her "mysterious manifestations" and "series of bewildering effects" had any relation to Spiritualism or that the performer herself claimed to be a "medium", as she was called by Dr. C. M. Davies (22, p. 250) although he had to admit (op. cit., p. 255) that the spiritual character of the phenomena was never asserted.<sup>1</sup>

At the opening public performance (13 July, 1874) at the Queen's Concert Rooms, Hanover Square, Mr. Burns was at the door with Col. Fay receiving the members of the audience, which

<sup>1</sup> It was at this same point that was stressed in *The Times* of 17 July, 1874, when it stated that "no pretence to supernatural powers, to psychic, or to odic force, is put forward".

suggested that he considered the entertainment interesting to Spiritualists, as indeed it was since then as now there were very many persons, both learned and simple, who believed that any trick they could not understand was a "spiritual" phenomenon. A few of the more intelligent but sympathetic critics, such as Mr. C. White of the Marylebone Association of Inquirers into Spiritualism, said that if the Fays were mediums it was a disgraceful thing that they should act like conjurers, and if they were Spiritualists they should say so (*The Spiritualist*, 11 September, 1874, p. 130). Mr. Harrison, editor of *The Spiritualist*, who, at the opening of Miss Fay's entertainment, which lasted till 29 August, was somewhat hesitant, had decided by December that Miss Fay was a medium. She must have known that her first series of performances had so thoroughly mystified educated persons that this fact led her, in her second series, to agree with them in their belief that she was indeed a great spiritual medium<sup>1</sup> and thus she was able to persuade those who knew little of trickery to demand "scientific" investigation and so provide her with better advertisements than she had dared to hope for. It must be remembered that as early as June, 1874, before she had opened at the Queen's Concert Rooms on 13 July, Mr. F. W. H. Myers had "a sitting" with her (1, p. 90), and her public performance had apparently done little to shake his faith in the possibility that she might be "genuine". According to those privileged persons who are allowed access to the Myers papers it is said that late in 1874 Myers, Sidgwick and Rayleigh were being

<sup>1</sup>This reminds me of a certain performer in whose "paranormal" phenomena eminent persons believed, who protested to me, when I chided him for leading them astray, saying with a wink, "Who am I to contradict the learned world!" Of this aspect of parapsychology the Zancigs are excellent examples. When they opened their show in London in 1906 they made it quite clear in their hand-out that "everything you see although you may deem it remarkable, is perfectly natural". Sir Oliver Lodge and Dr. Nandor Fodor, to name but two, knew better. Fodor some years later stated that they claimed telepathy as an explanation and Lodge also said that he was inclined to think that the Zancigs had telepathic powers. Like so many of the leaders of the Society for Psychical Research Lodge believed what he wanted to believe. After a single sitting with the Crandons he thought it absurd to have any doubts about their genuineness and he told one of his correspondents that he could be quite certain that they were all right. According to the late Mr. David Devant, Lodge even had an idea that Miss Dora Devant was a medium because he had not understood how their mental transference was done. This nonsense has been going on since the 1870's when Crookes's mentor, Benjamin Coleman, thought the Maskelyne entertainment exhibited the paranormal, just as Alfred Russel Wallace, Sir A. Conan Doyle and Hewat McKenzie were all convinced that the tricks they sometimes could not understand were "paranormal" phenomena.

approached regarding an "extensive investigation of Mrs. Fay's mediumship" (1, p. 90). Among those who might take part were Myers, Crookes, Sidgwick, Rayleigh and possibly Gurney. It was actually proposed that £300 or £400 be paid for a series of "sittings".

When Miss Fay was in London for her second series, opening on 11 November, she found herself being hailed as a physical medium, which she was claiming to be, and she was receiving the marked attentions of Mr. Myers to whom "each accession of intimacy" had led him to increase his respect for "her uprightness, courage and kindness". Crookes too was running after "Eva", as Myers called her, giving himself what Sidgwick called "airs of tyranny" and clearly showing that he wanted to be first with his latest discovery, thus indicating that the "investigators" were already beginning to distrust one another while, incredible as it may seem, trusting in "Eva"!

Meanwhile Myers had made a discovery, the details of which we owe to Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst (1, p. 92) who printed two letters on the subject. In the first letter (3 December, 1874) from Myers to Sidgwick the former says, after mentioning Crookes, that "the lion will not let himself be robbed of his cub — nor the cub of her lion", suggesting that Crookes was already trying to make Eva his personal protégée and that Eva was not averse from acting in such a rôle. Six days later Myers wrote to Sidgwick a second time, revealing that Stainton Moses had "seen Eva's 'Willy' doing the manifestations for her". Although there is, as far as I know, not a shred of evidence that Willy was Mr. W. Fay, who was, I think, in the West Indies at the time, Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst state that Mr. W. Fay was Eva's husband and that he assisted her in giving her "fraudulent help" (1, p. 155).<sup>1</sup>

In mentioning the incident Myers told Sidgwick that this was a case of "another dupe", that is to say Stainton Moses, bearing witness to "the juggler who cannot appreciate Moralists". Mr. Medhurst and I are in agreement that the "dupe" was Moses and the "Moralist" was Sidgwick. He thinks, however, that "the juggler" was Eva, which seems to me most improbable considering that Myers later in the same letter speaks of the proposed investigation of Eva and broadly hints that Col. Fay's "past crimes" were those of helping Eva out, since he goes on to say that in the forthcoming enquiry nobody has proposed that he

<sup>1</sup>Since corrected by Mr. Medhurst in *Light*, Spring 1966, p. 40.

should have anything to do with it, adding that Eva told him "privily" and did not want it spread for his sake. In brief, the evidence seems to me to point to the fact that Moses mistook Col. Fay's hands for Eva's control "Willy", a supposition not endorsed by Myers who, supported by Miss Fay herself, concluded that Col. Fay was the juggler. It is clear that Myers himself still believed in Eva's genuineness in spite of Col. Fay's kind help when the spirits failed.

Early in 1875 further complications developed. Rayleigh complained to Myers of Eva's "extraordinary conduct" and the odd behaviour of Crookes which led him to attach less value than he had previously done to his testimony. Also Crookes's behaviour in relation to Mrs. Jencken's marriage was so strange that her husband refused even to meet him.

Eva's position was very delicate. A young American vaudeville performer whose visit to England was mainly to present her mysterious entertainment found herself the centre of a body of eminent literary and scientific men, being treated as a "medium" whom it was necessary to "investigate". Having already forgotten more tricks than these people were ever likely to know and probably astonished at their innocent credulity, she succumbed to temptation, although she had to make use of all her ingenuity to deceive them. If they were determined on her being a medium, then she would agree and cash in on it while she could. Thus in her hand-out for the second series of performances in London the "Indescribable Phenomenon" becomes "the Celebrated Spiritual Medium". At her séances materializations<sup>1</sup> were displayed and at the back of the sheets were extracts from the account sent by Crookes to *The Spiritualist* of 12 March, 1875, of the marvellous success of his electrical test in the presence of a distinguished company.

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst state (1, p. 116) that Miss Fay was *not* their italics) a materialization medium, but there is no truth in this assertion. As early as January, 1875, when giving her second series of performances in London she advertised her materializations and by the time she had returned to the United States and had taken up her work again under the management of the notorious H. Melville Fay in 1879 her phenomena appear to have been most remarkable. Eva was advertised as being levitated with fully-formed phantoms conversing and shaking hands with the sitters. Dr. W. S. Stevens was privileged to see seven full-forms at once, some of whom played upon the piano which was raised three feet in the air, all the phenomena occurring in full gas-light. Helping Eva in these remarkable phenomena were two other mediums, so it is possible that these materializations were due to their mediumship rather than to Eva's, although there seems to be no certainty about this.

Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst seem (1, p. 102) to have been so much impressed by this story that their view of Miss Fay appears to have been coloured by it. But knowing what we do about this lady's background and history can it really be believed that at any time in her career she was a medium producing paranormal effects? The account of the electrical test may or may not have been as described. The crucial parts may have been innocently omitted by Crookes, as is commonly the case where clever conjuring effects are described by laymen. It is futile to discuss "explanations" until the full facts be known and these may now never be known.<sup>1</sup> If the facts which *are* known about Annie Eva Fay are not sufficient to suggest that her so-called "mediumship" was to a great extent thrust upon her by the attentions of credulous persons, then it is open to objectors to believe that she was really a powerful medium who, like Dr. Lynn, J. N. Maskelyne, David Devant and Harry Houdini prostituted her gifts, the reason for this belief being that they do not understand how the tricks of these masters of deception were accomplished. Why they should expect to do so is entirely beyond my comprehension.

Two months after Miss Fay's success with the electrical tests she was off again on her tour of the provinces and in due course arrived at Birmingham where she opened early in May. Here she was again described as the "Indescribable Phenomenon" and her show billed as an entertainment. Nevertheless she continued to trade on her mediumistic reputation, sustained as she was by Crookes, and advertised private séances to the nobility and gentry, with the addition of the materialization of the "spirit form" in the drawing room of the Midland Hotel. The Press was enthusiastic in praise of her entertainment, given as it was by a "ladylike, pretty and fascinating" performer, but what was going on behind the scenes was only published in part.

After leaving London for her provincial tour Miss Fay's managers must have been quite bewildered. They had to realize that many academic persons and even members of the nobility were so impressed by her show that they were actually trying to arrange an "investigation" of her "mediumship" and were prepared to pay large sums to her for this purpose. The managers,

<sup>1</sup> An excellent and revealing criticism of the Varley electrical tests was contributed by Mr. Colin Brookes-Smith to the *Journal* of the S.P.R. (March, 1965, XLIII, pp. 26-31). He points out a number of methods that might have been used for evading the tests and the whole paper should be carefully read. Cf. also Mr. C. J. Stephenson's comments in the *Proc.* of the S.P.R., 1966, LIV, pp. 363 ff.

seeing that this extraordinary "investigation" of a vaudeville performer was unlikely to put any money into their pockets, as Miss Fay might say that it was none of their business, apparently determined to act without her connivance. A series of letters passed between them and Mr. J. N. Maskelyne suggesting that a public exposure of the whole affair should be arranged in London and that the methods that had so successfully hoodwinked her academic friends should be revealed. In this scheme Mr. Maskelyne declined to co-operate. According to Crookes Miss Fay wrote to him telling him about the whole business and deploring the temptations and persecution to which she was being subjected (*The Spiritualist*, 28 December, 1877, p. 312). This tale was later confirmed by Eva herself when she wrote to the *Banner of Light* in 1878 defending Crookes against Carpenter's attacks and saying how in 1875 it was proposed to pay her to expose the whole affair, but that she told them that she had nothing to expose, a story which must have amused her managers greatly. The same kind of proposal was, she wrote, again made in 1877 when she again declined to enter in any such arrangement (1, pp. 104-5). This refusal on the part of Miss Fay seems to have been the most sensible thing for her to do. She was a music-hall artist and a "medium" on the side, as it were, but both businesses were connected since the various calico tie tricks and mentalist effects were part of her show on the stage as well as in the séance room. To declare the whole thing a "fraud" was not only to destroy her earning power as a medium but to expose her methods would be to lessen and practically destroy her attraction on the stage as an "indescribable phenomenon". Eva was no fool when it came to business. On the other hand it may well have been that, when she did get back to the United States, she told people about her adventures in England, although when challenged, she denied it. This report<sup>1</sup> is to be found in an Editorial Note in *Spiritual Notes* (1879, 1, p. 145) where the statement is made that Miss Fay said that when denying the story she was not telling the truth, the editor dryly asking whether it would be wrong to anticipate "that she will simply do what promises to pay the best".

Apart from the trouble that Miss Fay had with her managers in Birmingham another report was rife the nature of which is by no means clear. In *The Medium and Daybreak* (21 May, 1875,

<sup>1</sup> Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst seem to have decided to omit this story, if they were aware of it.

p. 333) a letter appeared from her saying that she had heard it reported that "she would speak ill of a medium" and that she wished to state that she thought all "mediums should sustain each other" and that though "a person be disliked that is no reason why the mediumship of that person should be derided".

This letter, obscure as it is with our present knowledge, is all the more odd in view of the extraordinary Crookes-Showers-Fay quarrel which Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst have described on pp. 113 ff. of their paper (1) in which they print some of Crookes's private correspondence on the affair. Crookes asserted (in November, 1875) that Miss Mary Showers (whom we shall deal with later) had confessed to Miss Fay that she was a fraudulent medium and that he had therefore got her to obtain a written confession from Miss Showers, which she did. Had this story not been told by Crookes himself in a letter to D. D. Home which has been preserved it would be indeed difficult to believe it. In their treatment of the incident Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst link it with the famous letter (8 March, 1876) which Sergeant Cox wrote to D. D. Home and which the latter printed in his *Lights and Shadows of Spiritualism* (London, 1877, pp. 326-329) and which they reprint (with important omissions) in their paper (1, p. 117). It is, of course, possible that this letter does refer to the alleged Showers-Fay confession and not, as Mr. Hall thought, to Florence Cook writing to Mary Showers. On the other hand, their theory raises formidable difficulties. There is no good evidence, I think, that Mary Showers was ever on such intimate terms with Eva Fay. She must have known that the latter was an American public performer who not only gave stage shows but private "sittings" to many notable persons living at the time. Yet Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst apparently think that Mary told Eva that she, Mary, was a fraud, that Eva at once told Crookes, who had seen Mary's full-form materialization playing tricks with Florence Cook's "Katie King" in his own house, and that then Crookes asked Eva to obtain a long written "confession" from Mary as to how she did it. Without further evidence I find this theory very difficult to accept. Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst think (1, p. 116) that support is to be found in the unpublished letters but some of their reasons seem to me to be somewhat weak. Thus they say that Miss Fay was *not* (their italics) a materialization medium, which, as we have shown, is contrary to fact. They stress the mention of accomplices, although if they existed and Miss Showers was the medium concerned, then among them must be included Messrs. Luxmoore, Dunphy

and Tapp, the motives inspiring them being not so much as hinted at by Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst, who have no compunction in insinuating that other distinguished persons are confederates if it can help their case in defending Crookes.

Let us now sum up what are apparently facts that must be accepted. Some time before November, 1875, Crookes asserted that Mary Showers had confessed to Eva Fay "that her manifestations were all a trick" (1, p. 113). He asked D. D. Home not to say anything about it as he had warned only his "private friends". Since the Fays had left England late in June or early in July, 1875, the alleged confession to Miss Fay was probably in May or June, 1875, or even earlier. Whether Harrison, editor of *The Spiritualist*, had heard of this scandal we do not know. Something clearly must have caused him to write his extraordinary editorial of 25 June where he speaks of physical mediums trying to ruin each other and the "invention and circulation of the most atrocious scandals". He went on to say that if what was known could be printed it would reveal "a depth of depravity . . . which is simply appalling". For the editor of one of the two leading Spiritualist journals to write thus must seemingly imply knowledge of various unsavoury matters, and his reference to mediums trying to ruin each other might well show knowledge of what Miss Fay was meaning when she wrote in May, 1875, that it was reported that she "would speak ill of a medium" (*The Medium and Daybreak*, 21 May, 1875). Moreover, Harrison might also have heard the rumours that certain of Mrs. Guppy's séances were really cover for assignation meetings, just as Margaret Fox said in 1888 when she revealed to the *New York Times* that at some of the séances in England there were "shameless goings on that vie with the secret Saturnalia of the Romans" (21, p. 176).

So far we have had two explanations of the letter from Cox to Home regarding the account of how one medium wrote to another describing how the materialization fraud was accomplished. Mr. Hall thought that it was by Florence Cook instructing Mary Showers: Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst disagreed: they put forward the theory that it referred to the confession of Mary Showers mentioned by Crookes and was a letter instructing Miss Fay. For the reasons outlined above this theory is very difficult to accept, although some may prefer it to that advanced by Mr. Hall. It must be remembered that, as Miss Fay's business agent said at the time, Miss Fay was "in the ring of all the best mediums in London" and it was natural for them to know each other and possibly to consult as to better methods of fooling the Spiritualists

and "investigators" who were clamouring for sittings. What motive then had Miss Fay in acting as a detective for Crookes and getting Mary Showers to "confess" to her by pretending she wanted instruction? There may be motives of which we know nothing, but on the face of it two only immediately suggest themselves. The first is that Miss Fay was determined to use Crookes for later advertising purposes which she had already done in her hand-out during her second London visit, and as his name carried weight in the United States, she continued to use it in her hand-outs during her 1879 American and Canadian tours. That Mrs. Showers was spreading scandalous rumours about Crookes in 1875 is certain from his own correspondence but whether these rumours hinted at the seduction of her daughter by Crookes we do not know. It seems likely that one of those spreading the reports was Mr. Luxmoore who may have been the person whom Crookes said, in his letter to Home of 3 November, 1875 (1, p. 113), had written "very shameful things about me to Paris" so that he was getting the reputation of a Don Juan. If this be the case the "shameful things" could hardly have referred to Mary Showers alone. Others must have been suggested; and it seems to me quite possible that one of them was Eva Fay and another Florence Cook. If it were only Mary Showers then the story, I think, does not make sense.

If we reject both these theories regarding the two mediums mentioned by Cox, does any other theory cover the facts as far as we know them? Only one, I think, and that concerns the mystery of Lottie Fowler. This lady, who was one of the most interesting clairvoyants and psychometrists of the period, arrived in London from the United States towards 1871. She gave innumerable séances and visited many cities in Great Britain. An account of herself was published late in 1874 (*The Medium and Daybreak*, 20 November, 1874, p. 741) and early in 1875 she attended a séance with Mary Showers and was much impressed. Mary Showers evidently trusted her, since in March of the same year she was one of the privileged ones who was allowed to go to feel the medium behind the curtain while the manifestations were taking place. Now, between March and July, 1875, a change was taking place in Miss Fowler's mediumship. We have seen that the spring or early summer of 1875 was the time when Mary Showers was supposed to have confessed to Eva Fay that her mediumship was fraudulent, and if this be true then Lottie Fowler could hardly be unaware of it, being an acute American medium and not one of the dupes crowding to Mary Showers's séances.

In July, 1875, Miss Lottie Fowler was reported as being a physical medium: by October she was performing inside a bag while "spirit hands" were seen outside and by April of the following year spirit forms were appearing and paraffin mould tests were being given, while in May the versatile lady was obliging with a show resembling Eva Fay's, leaving for the United States in late September, 1876. No such transformation of a purely mental medium into an exponent of the most varied physical phenomena is known to me. What had happened?

Since, as seems to be usual in this subject, we do not know the full facts of the case, all that can be said is pure speculation. We do know, however, that in the years prior to her return to the United States, Miss Fowler had not been too successful; her clients were dwindling and her health far from good. Is it possible that she thought that there might be an opportunity to return to public favour if she became a physical medium, for it must have been obvious to her that these performances attracted attention from the nobility, the gentry and even from the world of literature, science and art?

As we have seen, Miss Fowler was a trusted friend of Mary Showers and it does not seem to me at all impossible that the latter, knowing that Miss Fowler was about to enter the physical phenomena business, consented to write to her telling her a few facts about how the shows were conducted and how an "assured friend" was advisable to help with the deception. In any case Miss Fowler was highly successful, although her star faded rapidly and she soon returned to the United States. Perhaps she never found the "assured friend", an expression used by Cox in his letter to D. D. Home and thought by Mr. Hall to be a reference to the relationship between William Crookes and Florence Cook, but omitted by Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst in their transcription of the document (1, p. 117).

Clearly there was confusion when Eva Fay got home. News of her exploits and the belief held by Crookes and others that her "mediumship" was genuine must have preceded her; and when she arrived the authorities decided that there was to be no nonsense of this sort in the United States. Judge Donohue in Supreme Court Chambers decided that Annie Eva Fay, the "spiritual test medium" had to take out a juggler's licence for her show, and that was that.

In 1887 to 1891 Eva Fay was touring Europe visiting England, Germany, Sweden, Spain and even Russia. Her adventures in Germany were especially interesting since there the same controversies broke out as to the precise nature of the "phenomena" she exhibited. Numbers of credulous persons who sponsored spiritualistic mediums naturally believed that Eva's tricks were psychic, just as those did in England when they did not understand how they were done. Naturally, such a situation was good for show business; and as in England, Eva was not averse from encouraging the belief that she was a "medium" if thereby she could get appointments for private sittings so that the believers could enjoy themselves "investigating" her. Thus when she was in Hamburg Mr. Sydney Müller learnt from her about her psychic powers, but when she arrived at Leipzig things were a little different. At this period she was again using her hand-out in which she was styled "The Indescribable Phenomenon" and in which Crookes was cited as supporting her. But the press was in no mood to believe in any psychic explanation and the *General Anzeiger* of 16 November, 1890, described the show and the remarkable prestidigitation displayed in it. In Magdeburg controversy was acute and the impresario who was helping to manage Eva's tour joined the conflict in a reply to Dr. H. Lux, who had thought it worth while to argue with those who were trying to establish the genuineness of Eva's supposed paranormal powers. In the *Beilage zur Volksstimme* Dr. Lux contributed an interesting account of the show, but clearly had no belief in any psychic explanation. There seems no doubt that Eva Fay's method of letting the public guess the solution to the puzzles she presented was a powerful factor in her success, just as the procedure adopted by the Piddingtons in their famous broadcasting act gave them far greater publicity than they would otherwise have enjoyed.

In the autumn of 1906 Mr. H. A. Parkyn, Editor of the magazine *Suggestion*, contributed a long article on the trick methods used by Miss Fay in her billet-reading tests, describing the preparation of the pads and the use of confederates among the audience. This "exposure" was hardly necessary, since it was at this time that she was stating in her programme that credulous and foolish persons should not be influenced by her performance since she was "not a spiritualistic medium" and there was nothing "either supernatural or miraculous" about her performance.

In spite of these disavowals of any supernatural power, a further "exposure" occurred in February, 1907, when Prof. W. S. Barnickel described some of her methods and in a St. Louis paper she was actually described as a "far from clever charlatan". But in 1908 a Cincinnati paper said that one might just as well expose Kellar, Herrmann or any other sleight-of-hand expert. Miss Fay, the reporter continued, makes no greater pretence than they do albeit, he added, "she accomplishes more". The fact was that her attitude had to change when confronted with different situations. Annie Eva Fay was primarily a vaudeville star presenting highly mysterious effects. To obtain the maximum publicity she was a Spiritualist when confronted by Spiritualists, a vaudeville exponent of the mysterious when confronted by sensible reporters and members of her own profession, and an exponent of the sixth sense when confronted by serious sceptics who wanted to know how it was done.

Meanwhile her son, John T. Fay, had grown up and married Miss Dean, one of the assistants at Eva's show, but soon left home and set up on his own with his wife and ran a rival show so similar to his mother's that she attempted legal action to restrain him. The court, however, refused the application, declaring that it could not adjudicate in a dispute between charlatans.

Miss Fay thus continued giving her performances and in 1912 she decided to visit Europe again. In January, 1913, now Anna Eva Fay, she opened at the Coliseum in London where she gave a brilliant performance, dividing it into two parts, in one of which she still showed the bandage tests and in the other her remarkable mentalist demonstration. The Spiritualists were as usual delighted with Eva Fay's occult powers and one of their leaders, Mr. J. Hewat McKenzie who in 1920 was to become Principal of the British College of Psychic Science, was able to describe how she did it. He stated that a small pair of materialized and apparently jointless hands and arms, somewhat like those of a monkey, protruded from her chest. He was even able to smell the odour from the emanation of the psycho-plastic matter during the time these little hands shot in and out of Eva's chest.

During her visit I was able to see something of her and was successful in getting her proposed and elected as an Hon. Associate of the Magic Circle. Even at that time she was extremely prepossessing with a perfect complexion and sparkling blue eyes.

together with a mass of silvery hair. Her return to England appeared not to be noticed by the Society for Psychical Research. Although Crookes was still active and took the chair at a Council Meeting on 28 May, 1913, there is no record, as far as I know, of any statement or opinion expressed by him concerning the little lady of whose "mediumship" he had no doubts in 1875. The opportunity which then arose to ask him to make a statement on the whole extraordinary affair of thirty-eight years previously was again passed over. We do not even know if he slipped one day into the Coliseum to see how his little "cub" was faring. He may have invited her to Kensington Park Gardens to meet some of her friends of the early days, such as Lord Rayleigh. If he did we have, I think, no record of it.

In 1917 she bought a farm in New Hampshire and arranged for some twenty Belgian orphans to be brought to America to live there and be educated at her expense until they attained the age of twenty-one. Ten years later she called on my old friend and colleague Dr. Walter F. Prince, who spent an afternoon with her. She showed him a little effect which he found more puzzling than anything he had seen at the eleven sittings he had had with Margery Crandon. Two months later she died at her home at Melrose, Mass. She had had a long, adventurous and very successful life. Superb at her own highly specialized line of showmanship she was able to interest the public in two continents for many years. Knowing what we do of her, can anyone in their sober senses believe that she was the great physical medium Crookes thought she was? Whether he really believed this or said so for other motives may never be known. If there were indeed other motives, what were they?

### III

#### MARY ROSINA SHOWERS

It is not my intention in this chapter to describe in any detail the extraordinary case of the most versatile medium of the nineteenth century, Miss Mary Rosina Showers. An account of her family, her marriages, her sittings in London in the 1870's and her tragic later life has been written by Mr. Mostyn Gilbert, who has undertaken the most laborious researches into official documents, unpublished letters and correspondence, together with personal visits to surviving descendants of this most remarkable family. My purpose here is rather to link up the Showers mediumship with that of Florence Cook, to examine the relationship that existed between them and Sir William Crookes and also to deal with the alleged confession of fraud on the part of Miss Showers which, as already mentioned, Crookes stated that he had obtained from her through the co-operation of Annie Eva Fay possibly at some time in 1875. What is now clear is that, as in so many other cases, officials of the Society for Psychical Research have done everything possible to conceal the facts about Miss Showers, her name not appearing even once in the three volumes of the Society's Combined Index of its *Journal* and *Proceedings*. Mention of her, however, will be found on p. 46 of Part X of the *Proceedings* (1886), where Mrs. Sidgwick stated that her first practical experience in spiritualism began in 1874 at a sitting with Miss Showers in which the phenomena were "very inconclusive". The subsequent silence of the S.P.R. officials is all the more curious since the controversy between Professor Sidgwick and Mr. C. C. Massey, printed in the same volume of the Society's *Proceedings*, proves that non-professional mediums were much favoured by the Society in preference to professional paid mediums. The reasons for this evasive secrecy are somewhat obscure although Mr. Gilbert has discovered a number of facts that throw much light on it but need not detain us here.

Mary Rosina Showers was born about 1856. She was a daughter of General Charles Lionel Showers who married a widow and who died at Geneva on 13 September, 1895. Both he and

his wife were most remarkable people and the history of the family might also be thought fictional if Mr. Mostyn Gilbert had not shown that the stories about them were founded on fact.

We first hear rumours about Mary Showers' amazing mediumship in the pages of *The Spiritualist* in 1873-4 when Mrs. Showers contributed three articles (1873; pp. 487-490; 1874, pp. 30-32; 42-44) describing the astonishing manifestations going on in their house at Teignmouth. Whether these accounts are wholly or partly imaginary it is impossible now to ascertain. If Miss Showers and the domestic maid were engaged in playing a series of elaborate tricks it seems almost incredible that Mrs. Showers could have been deceived by them. Indeed, the position of Mrs. Showers throughout the history of her daughter's mediumship remains very obscure. It is true that she was highly unstable and neurotic and later, like her daughter, succumbed to alcoholism, but that she was deceived by her daughter (if indeed Mary was a fraud) and that she believed in the reality of her mediumship seems almost impossible, although there is some evidence to suggest that she did. In parapsychology the credulity of persons appears to be so unfathomable that anything is possible. After the publication of Mrs. Showers's articles the position of mother and daughter changed. It is very possible that Mr. J. C. Luxmoore, a member of an old West of England family, whose protégée, Miss Florence Cook, was then actively pursuing her mediumship in London, met the Showers family in Teignmouth and proposed a visit to London in order to introduce a rival to Florence to the Spiritualists in the metropolis who were always avid to gape at fresh marvels. Nothing suited Mrs. Showers better. From the dull life in Teignmouth she would be introduced to the fashionable world of London and her distinguished relations would help her in gaining access to the houses of the nobility and gentry who were well known to Mr. Luxmoore, who had a large house in London where séances were continually being held and who knew the leading officials of the Dalston Association which was closely associated with Florence Cook and her family. It was here that Mary Showers probably met the Cooks but no account of their first meeting has, I think, been preserved, although Mary attended one of Florence Cook's sittings late in mid-March. Early in that year Mary Showers was giving sittings in London with such distinguished sitters as Lord Rayleigh, William Crookes and Stainton Moses. By March she was established as one of the most astounding mediums for full-form materializations in London. Florence Cook was present at one or more of her séances and on

one occasion she was permitted to kiss Mary's full-form materialization, called Florence Maple,<sup>1</sup> so it is clear that they understood one another well at the time. During these sittings surprising events occurred. Miss Showers herself was partial to tarts and Florence Maple did not refuse such delicacies as biscuits and sweets. This phantom (its striking resemblance to its medium was remarked by more than one observer) must have sometimes taken material from poor Miss Showers for the latter was seen one day in the cabinet shrivelled up like a mummy, which proved the devastating effect these phenomena sometimes had on the medium who produced them.

Meanwhile Crookes had not been inactive. He was, as might have been expected, anxious to see Miss Showers and, as far as I have been able to disentangle the confused chronology, he had in March, 1874, invited Florence Cook and Mary Showers to give one or more sittings in his house when the two materialized forms of Katie King and Florence Maple walked about outside the cabinet and "in a strong light". Whether it was at one of these extraordinary performances that Serjeant E. W. Cox was present and which he was to describe so vividly I am not certain, but it seems quite possible. Anyway, it was perhaps this incident of the appearance of Katie King and Florence Maple playing about together that is the one that has most troubled Mr. Hall's critics. And well it might, for the most serious critic of these extraordinary events was Serjeant Cox himself, who can hardly be considered by the defence as an obdurate sceptic or an ill-informed and ignorant observer. It must be remembered that Cox was *there*, gave his opinion in writing *at the time* and what he said he saw and what he thought about it must carry some weight.

The alleged materialization of full-forms was not something that Cox saw perhaps only once and then in a poor light and under bad conditions. He saw these phenomena, he said, many times but never when conditions gave him perfect assurance, for the reason that the "many simple and sure tests" by which it could be proved that the medium was in the cabinet while the form was out of it were not applied when he was present. Some excuse, he writes, was always given for not trying such tests.

Cox's position was difficult to assail since he was one of the few, then or since, to understand what the fact of the materialization of a full-form implied. To him it was so outstanding, so

<sup>1</sup>This name is sometimes spelt Maple and sometimes Maples in the contemporary literature.

utterly at variance with all our conceptions both of spirit and of matter, and so entirely inexplicable by any theory, however wild, that he thought — and here I agree with him — that it could only be accepted as a fact on the most conclusive evidence. Science, he thought, had the right to ask why such proofs were denied, for he was well aware that proof was not difficult were it only to be permitted by the mediums, their protectors and their friends. Cox had little patience with the various excuses offered: indeed, he regarded them as highly suspicious.

Certainly he had ample opportunities to observe in full light the frolics of Katie King and Florence Maple. Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst printed one account in their report (1, p. 109). There they were, chattering, playing tricks, patting and pushing the observers. They were facsimiles of the two mediums supposed to be asleep in the cabinet: they breathed and perspired and even ate, and were clearly solid flesh and bone. Were these two ladies Florence Cook and Mary Showers or were they not? As Cox himself says, "The fact might have been established in a moment beyond all doubt by the simple process of opening the curtain and exhibiting the two ladies then and there upon the sofa, wearing their black gowns".

Was this simple, reasonable test permitted? It was not, for, Cox says, certain conditions were exacted from the observers, these being that they should do nothing by which, if it were a trick, they should be enabled to discover it.

Now, where was this remarkable exhibition staged and under whose auspices? This question has not been stressed by the defence but the answer is hardly reassuring. It was, in all probability, in Crookes's own house and it was he who, we may assume, had full control over the performance. Can any reasonable person really bring himself to believe that the refusal to permit the simple test proposed by Cox was not due to the fact that the performance was blatantly fraudulent and that Crookes knew that it was?

These observations by Mr. Cox naturally did not please the editor of *The Spiritualist* who was quick to point out that his statements showed that he placed no reliance whatever upon the stories told by Crookes of how he had been in the cabinet with Florence Cook and Katie King at the same time.

Later in 1874 Cox returned to the assault and contributed a trenchant letter in reply to his critics. He began by asking what were the facts that were asserted. They were, he writes, "that the medium is placed alone in a dark room, or cabinet or recess, wearing her ordinary clothes with her hair dressed *à-la-mode*, a curtain being drawn between this room or recess, the spectators sitting in the room on the other side of the curtain, that room being sufficiently lighted to enable them to see distinctly whatsoever occurs there. But after more or less of interval, varying from a quarter to half an hour, a form comes from behind the curtain into the room where the spectators sit, clothed with a white head-dress and in a white robe that falls to the feet. This form is almost if not completely a facsimile<sup>1</sup> of the medium who was placed behind the curtain, in face, in figure, in movement. It is no phantom, not even the crust of a human form, but a perfect human body, having so far as the senses can show us, all the shape and organs and functions of a woman. It has flesh, and bones, and hair, and nails, and saliva, and blood, and veins, and a beating heart, and a perspiring skin. Moreover it has a brain and a nerve structure obedient to that brain. And that brain is an educated brain, and has received an English education, for it converses in English. Nor does the wonder end here. It has learned to play the piano, which is a mechanical as well as an intellectual performance, only to be acquired by practice. This form talks the language of our time, plays and sings, jests, and is quick at repartee. Talking involves the possession of the entire apparatus needful to that process; hence, though we cannot see or feel them, we know that there must be lungs and the complicated mechanism of the trachea, and this implies blood, and blood implies a heart and muscles to move it, and nerves to set the muscles in action. It is a solid form, for Mr. Crookes has more than once, by permission, put his arm round its waist, and it is a warm, womanly form, with feelings, for it kisses and is kissed."

To suppose that this form is that of the medium is, Cox continues, to make a mistake. "This form he sees and touches," so believers assure us, is not the medium but another being; "that although so like one to the other, they are not the same;

<sup>1</sup> Dr. W. L. Richardson, writing in March, 1874, noted the "intense likeness" between Mary Showers and Florence Maple (*The Medium and Daybreak*, 13 March, 1874, pp. 165-6). For a later view of this problem of resemblance see Mr. W. H. Harrison's letter in *The Spiritualist*, 28 December, 1877.

that at the very time the form is before the curtain, walking, talking, playing, the medium is behind the curtain, in a condition of unconscious trance, dressed in gown and hair precisely as when she was placed there.

"It may be answered that if this be so, some other human being is personating the medium before the curtain. If not this, what is it? And this is the explanation given: 'The form you see, hear, touch, that precisely resembles a human being in shape and structure, and differs in no perceptible particular from other human beings, is no human being at all, but a spirit that presents itself in perfect human form'."

As Cox himself insists, this is "an astounding answer, not to be accepted on any mere assertion, and the amazed spectator demands the proof of it, and the obvious method of proof is by conclusive evidence — by which I mean the best evidence that can be given — that the fact, seemingly incredible as it is, is nevertheless true."<sup>1</sup>

Continuing his analysis, Cox stated that the "only conclusive evidence in such a case, and that which alone can overcome the apparently overwhelming evidence of the senses, and conclusions of reason and science against this alleged incarnation of a spirit, is the exhibition of the medium and the form coexisting at the same moment, the one on the one side of the curtain, the other on the other side of it, to be witnessed by several spectators at the same time, and in circumstances and under conditions that preclude deception by the medium, or delusion [*sic*] of the senses by the spectators." Evidence of this sort, Cox insists, can easily be had, for example the curtain might be lifted and then "all the spectators would then see the medium and the form at the same moment, and it is equally easy to assure themselves that the medium is herself and no other".

Following up this line of thought Cox then stated that he could find no evidence that a simple test had been applied. He was, of course, aware of the sitting with Florence Cook when Katie King took her departure and when the curtain was drawn back so that all could see the figure of the sleeping medium. This, he said, at first sight might seem to have been what was wanted but, as the report stated, her face was covered with a red shawl to keep the light from it. "May it not have been,"

<sup>1</sup> Cf. C. Richet, *Traité de Métapsychique*, 2 éd. (Paris, 1923), p. 715.

Cox asks, "to keep eyes from it?" There was, as Cox insisted, no proof that it was Miss Cook's body. Indeed, he concluded, "the concealment of the face by the shawl raises indeed a very strong presumption to the contrary".

These pertinent questions much irritated the editor of *The Spiritualist* and he added a footnote asking Mr. Cox why he ignored Crookes's story of seeing the faces of Florence Cook and Katie King at the same time, or the tales about the two materialized forms walking about Crookes's library in full light. Is it not possible, we may well ask to-day, that Cox did not quote these stories for the simple reason that the source from which they came had already become suspect to him?

Summing up his impressions, Cox puts the facts of the controversy in their true light. These were the same then as they are now. They are these. "1. All the prescribed conditions are such as facilitate trickery, if designed, and to prevent, and not to promote inquiry. Friends are posted on either side of the curtain, as if to exclude a too curious eye. If any strangers are present, hands are to be held. The singing usually invited diverts attention, and prevents the intent ear from perceiving movements behind the curtain. The hand of the 'spirit' is not to be held, only opened to a hasty touch. Visitors not known to have the firmest faith are placed in a semicircle and conditioned not to rush forward or grasp. A considerable time elapses before the form appears. The sitting is not closed and the curtains withdrawn so that all may see, for a long time after the form has retired. None are admitted behind the curtain until the most perfect confidence is placed in their previously assured faith. Even the few thus favoured were not admitted at once, but by slow degrees — thus far to-night — a little further another night — as trial proved the extent of their inquisitorial purposes or powers.

"2. This unquestionable likeness of the form to the medium. When I saw them they were not merely resemblances; they were facsimiles. I had carefully noted the shape of the eyebrows, which cannot be altered, and they were the same in the medium and the form. The hands were identical. The movements of the body were precisely similar. Now what is the answer to this most suspicious fact? There is no escape from it. Either the form is 'the double' of the medium, or it is another being. If the double of the medium, and the substantial form is borrowed from the medium, the weight of the substantial form must be so much taken from the weight of the medium. If this were so,

the medium must be a mere shell, and must die. The theory of 'the double' is therefore exploded. But if Katie and Florence are distinct beings from Miss Cook and Miss Showers — the forms of persons who once lived — to wit, Annie Morgan and Florence Maples — and whose atomic spirit structure is suddenly changed into molecular structure, how comes it that they precisely resemble Miss Cook and Miss Showers? It would be a marvellous coincidence if the real Annie Morgan claimed to have been a facsimile of Miss Cook, and it would be a combination of coincidences almost amounting to impossibility, that Florence Maples should also bear an exact resemblance to Miss Showers.

"3. But the difficulties do not end there. Assuming the forms to be Mesdames Morgan and Maples, who lived on earth some years ago, and who ever since have been dwelling in spirit land, how comes it that they think the thoughts and speak the languages and have the manners of girls of the year 1874, instead of the very different ideas, structure of talk and manners of our [*sic*=their] own time? And, more than this, why does Miss Maples play upon the piano tunes that have been composed since her death, and sing songs of recent date, instead of those that were known to her in life? It might have been thought than the best proof the two spirits could have given of their identity would have been to present themselves *as they were* in life, instead of appearing *as the mediums are*."

It is clear that these very sensible remarks by Serjeant Cox aroused the indignation of the circle of credulous supporters of the mediums and their letters followed in the Spiritualistic journals. For example, Mr. Benjamin Coleman pointed out in *The Spiritualist* for 26 June, 1874, that Cox was implying that those supporting the reality of the full-form materializations were either dupes or confederates and this naturally displeased him. To rebut these accusations he proceeded to describe an extraordinary séance with Mary Showers, conducted by the well-known London barrister, Mr. Henry Dunphy, in which sitting the materialized forms of Florence Maple and Lenore appeared and the latter, after some reluctance, allowed Mr. Coleman to kiss her, after which she tapped Lord Rayleigh on the nose with her bouquet and asked him whether it hurt.

After a few more hysterical letters by the believers, Mr. Cox, with exemplary patience, again tried to reason with his opponents in a long letter to *The Spiritualist* of 10 July, 1874.

Here he had to point out a fact that must have caused great irritation to Crookes and his friends. He insisted that Florence Maple had appeared with Katie King in Crookes's house on more than one occasion; and when Katie was asked if Florence was not really Mary Showers dressed up she refused to answer. Continuing, Cox insisted that the claim that believers required to be recognized as fact was in the highest degree improbable and therefore required the highest degree of proof that human testimony could afford. Proof, he went on to say, was quite easy but it was refused. This refusal might not be conclusive but it raised the gravest suspicion. It was true that Crookes had carried the inquiry further than anybody else and his testimony was by far the most weighty but, he asked, were Crookes's assurances sufficient to overcome "the enormous difficulties raised" by the nature of the claim, apart altogether from other suspicious circumstances. What was wanted was not one witness but twenty, not forms seen in dubious light but both mediums and forms in full light. But we are told that such tests disturbed conditions and interfered with the manifestations. Mr. Cox had no belief in this theory. He pointed out that the test was to be applied *after* the process of materialization was complete. It could not interfere with what had already been accomplished. Should any reasonable person, he asked, be satisfied if it were not done? Finally, he closed his letter by remarking that he and Crookes had lately had sittings together with Mr. Charles Williams where the conditions seemed highly satisfactory. Can we to-day doubt that when thus working with Crookes Cox asked him to arrange for the tests so that he might himself be convinced? Why was it that Crookes did not try to comply with these requests? There seems to have been ample opportunity since it was in June, 1875, nearly a year later, that Mrs. Crookes revealed the story of the astonishing Leila materialization with Florence Cook in Crookes's own house when, according to her, the separate identities of the medium and the figure were undeniably demonstrated. We do not know whether Cox was invited to any of those twenty or thirty sittings at which Mrs. Crookes said that tests of separate identities were given almost every night. Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst (1, p. 70) think it possible that Myers and even Edmund Gurney were present at some of those sittings, but I am informed that Myers's unpublished diary makes no mention of the miracles described by Mrs. Crookes, if we assume that the séances he notes were some of those described by her. In any case, it appears that Mr. Cox had to remain unsatisfied with regard to what he

considered to be crucial tests, whereas his friend William Crookes was almost nightly observing the very phenomena Cox wished so earnestly to see, a strange situation indeed.

Before closing this brief account of Serjeant Cox's observations I would add a few words more. If, at the joint sitting with Florence Cook and Mary Showers, the two of them were parading about the room dressed up as spirits, as Cox thought, then both were clearly playing fraudulent parts and both of them knew it. In other words, Florence knew that Mary was a fraud and Mary knew that Florence was. In view of Florence's relations with Crookes she must have been a bold young woman to hazard what might have been an unfortunate exposure. Might not her courage have been due to the fact that not only did the two mediums know the whole farce was a fraud, but that Crookes did also? When faced with a lesser dilemma, Mr. S. C. Hall, as we have already said, declared that he could imagine Crookes to be an ally rather than a victim. Mr. T. H. Hall's critics, on the other hand, appear to favour the reverse. They suggest, as it seems to me, that Crookes was deceived by this ridiculous performance, believing he was observing two materializations. The simplest arrangement would have sufficed to enable Mr. Cox to assure himself that this was so. No such attempt was made. If we are asked to think that Crookes really believed in all this, it appears that his modern defenders are reducing him almost to the level of an imbecile and denigrating him to a far greater degree than Mr. Hall has done. On the other hand we know that there is scarcely any absurdity that parapsychologists will not believe if their emotions are thereby satisfied.

Before closing this brief account of Mary Showers I must state quite frankly that I find the joint sittings incomprehensible. Had we more documentary material it might well be that we should find them easier to understand, but at the time of writing I cannot think of any facts that would help to make any sense of them. Even if we assume that Crookes believed in Florence Cook then the joint sittings may have at first strengthened his belief in Mary Showers in spite of the strange reticence of Katie King when questioned about Florence Maple. But *after* Mary Showers's alleged "confession" what could he have thought if we still assume he believed in Florence Cook? Did he still really believe that a genuine Katie King would play around his laboratory with Mary Showers dressed up as Florence Maple and that then she declined to discuss the matter when asked?

If, on the other hand, as Mr. Hall has suggested, Crookes was Florence's confederate (as Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst suggest that Luxmoore may have been that of Mary Showers) what motive could Crookes have had in permitting Mary Showers to give a joint sitting with Florence Cook? This would suggest that *before* he had obtained Mary's alleged confession he knew that Mary was fraudulent as well as Florence. Moreover, why did he invite Serjeant Cox to be present at this grotesque display described by the latter in the pages of *The Spiritualist*? Although Cox made no mention of others present at this farcical entertainment what must he have thought of Crookes acting as master of ceremonies and acceding to the "conditions" which effectively prevented the truth from being known? He *must* have thought that Crookes was either a credulous fool or was himself involved in the deception. Even if Crookes, as is strongly suggested by contemporary material, was determined to achieve scientific priority in these matters and behaved in a manner severely criticized by writers who knew the facts, I do not think that this view is very helpful in coming to a decision. What is abundantly clear is that his behaviour both at the time and later suggest that something very odd indeed was going on with regard to his relations with Florence Cook. Her own testimony as to what this was has been recorded by Mr. Anderson and I can see no reason whatever why the latter should have invented it or why Florence should tell him if it were not true. To suppose that by boasting of her conquests she was trying to impress Anderson seems to me to be patently absurd. Her own charms were quite sufficient to impress him without mentioning William Crookes of whom he might never have heard. All things considered, therefore, I think that Mr. Hall's suggestion as to Crookes's complicity is probably correct, and I do not think that his critics have successfully disposed of it, as they seem to me to have evaded the extreme difficulties of the two unpleasant alternatives open to them, namely that Florence Cook was genuine or that Crookes was completely deceived by her.

It would be unprofitable here to describe further the adventures of Mary Showers during her stay in London. It need hardly be said that her séances appeared to be even more striking than those recorded with Florence Cook. Crookes himself appeared somewhat reticent since he maintained that he had not had sufficient séances with Mary to come to an opinion. In the case of Miss Cook he had up to forty sittings before he had made up his mind, and even with her he had had at first even stronger

grounds for suspicion<sup>1</sup> than he had in the case of Miss Showers, although he had to admit that with her the evidence was very striking since a number of people, whom he appeared to consider trustworthy, had stated that they had seen Miss Showers and Florence at the same time.

In the meantime Mary Showers remained active until an astonishing series of events took place in June, 1875, which I have already dealt with when describing the activities of Annie Eva Fay in London. The importance of these incidents is obvious and had the facts not been preserved in unpublished letters from Crookes to D. D. Home we should never have known of them. It is quite possible that, had I not myself catalogued the entire D. D. Home Collection when it arrived at the Society for Psychical Research, it might have gone the way of the Barrett Collection which was either lost or more probably wantonly destroyed by officials of the Society. The preservation of these letters indicates how much was going on behind the scenes that never made its way into print. Thus many of our speculations and queries may be wide of the mark and might well have to be modified or abandoned altogether were we able to consult Crookes's own papers (destroyed by his family after his death), the Cox papers (hitherto untraced), the Barrett papers (destroyed or lost by the S.P.R.), the Showers papers and Isham papers (discovered in part by Mr. Mostyn Gilbert), the Wedgwood papers (lost or destroyed) and the Myers and Sidgwick papers of which the former have been made available to Dr. A. Gauld but have now been rendered difficult of access, owing to their contents throwing light on the activities of the early pioneers of the S.P.R. which were considered harmful to their reputations.

From Crookes's letter to D. D. Home of November, 1875, printed by Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst (I, p. 113), it is clear that according to Crookes Miss Showers was persuaded to make a "confession" that her "manifestations were all a trick" and that this alleged confession was given to Miss Fay who handed it on to Crookes. What induced Miss Showers to act in this way is very difficult to understand unless we assume, with Mrs. Goldney and Mr. Medhurst, that Miss Fay begged her to instruct her how to arrange the materialization business in return for instructing Miss Showers how to perform the calico bandage

<sup>1</sup>Crookes apparently never revealed what these grounds were, at which séances they arose and in what they consisted.

tests which were Miss Fay's speciality.<sup>1</sup> If this be so why did not Miss Showers tell Crookes of the bargain when she was challenged by Crookes regarding her "confession" and further why did she not tell Crookes what she knew about Florence Cook? It is true that Crookes promised to warn only his private friends of what he knew and apparently kept his promise since we know that Miss Showers shortly afterwards continued giving her performances and was still giving them for many years.

In another letter to D. D. Home written three days later (6 November, 1875) Crookes stated that, since Mary Showers begged him so earnestly not to expose her to her mother, it was "necessary to see her several times" and write a number of letters all of which were opened by Mrs. Showers and the contents substituted by others forged by herself. What the forgeries stated and what Mary Showers thought about them is unknown. It is certain that the whole scandal must have been widely known at the time, but had the letters from Crookes to Home not been preserved, we might never have known anything about it since Crookes and his friends to whom he confided at least part of the story and who were possibly F. W. H. Myers, Henry Sidgwick and Lord Rayleigh succeeded in suppressing the whole affair so that nothing appeared in print, possibly, like Crookes, believing that if so impudent a fraud were to be publicly exposed in the newspapers the "cause of truth" would suffer "a very great injury" (1, p. 114).

Any accurate account of these events I do not believe now to be possible. Lack of documents and the successful attempt to conceal the truth must make any reconstruction largely guesswork. As Mrs. Crookes wrote to D. D. Home in 1876 (1, p. 116) "very few spiritualists seem to me to have 'truth' for their motto" and she went on to say that these were much to blame for the scandal in Philadelphia over the exposure of the Holmes who had been denounced in England several times "but with the usual result".<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> By March, 1875, we know that Mary was sitting for phenomena of the Fay type and by April these were fully developed since a full account of this was published in *The Medium and Daybreak* for 16 April where such a séance was held in the presence of Capt. John James (later an Hon. Associate of the S.P.R.), his son, Edward Nugent James (who married Mary three years later) and Mr. and Mrs. Burns.

<sup>2</sup> This refers to the case of Mr. and Mrs. Nelson Holmes whose exposure in America in 1874 created a sensation since it resulted in a confession by a confederate who played the part of Katie King. Mme Blavatsky was associated with this pair during her American visit. She stated that they were both frauds and that Dr. H. T. Child, one of their most active supporters, was a confederate and a rascal, although later he appears to have claimed that he was deceived.

As has been said, the story that Mary Showers "confessed" to Eva Fay seems to me very unlikely if the word "confessed" is to be literally understood. What might very well have happened was that Mary Showers and Eva Fay met together one day for a little talk and then Eva, knowing full well that Mary produced no more genuine phenomena than she did herself, asked her to say just how she managed to arrange the full-form manifestation. Mary told her how it was staged, saying that confederates were necessary and then asked Eva to tell her in return how the calico bandage test worked as she wanted to enlarge her repertoire for the benefit of the dupes who were always asking for sittings. For some reason Eva told Crookes and was then asked by him to get Mary to write down how her performances were arranged. This she did and Eva handed it over to Crookes who thereupon challenged Mary on the subject. Mary must have been much surprised at this. What may have happened was that, knowing Florence Cook to be as fraudulent as herself after the joint sittings in Crookes's house, she could hardly have thought anything else than that Crookes was either completely deceived by this remarkable performance or was Florence's accomplice, just as she had her accomplices for her sittings. Pretending that her mother was quite unaware of her frauds, Mary got Crookes to promise not to tell her and thus avoid an open scandal, promising in the meantime to cease giving sittings. More than one meeting was necessary to arrange this, since if Crookes were willing to help in concealing the scandal from all but a few, she would promise not to raise a public scandal with regard to his relations with Florence and Eva Fay.

Another aspect of the matter must not be overlooked. Myers, the Sidgwicks and the future leaders of the S.P.R. were beginning to come to the conclusion which they tenaciously held for many years that while professional paid mediums were always suspect, unprofessional mediums and especially those in the upper social strata of society were not. This naive view has caused more trouble in the Society than any other and has been commented upon in more than one place. In the case of Mary Showers the question was raised in an acute form. Her father was a General in the Indian Army and her relations were totally unlike the humble folk around Florence Cook or the brash showmen managing Eva Fay. She was a friend of Mrs. Makdougall Gregory (widow of the famous Professor of Chemistry of Edinburgh, William Gregory [1803-1858], who in her turn was a friend of the Rayleigh family. In 1878 she was to marry Mr. Edward Nugent James, the second

son of Capt. J. James who was closely connected with a number of well-known people and was elected as Hon. Associate of the S.P.R. in 1884. It was he who wrote to *The Spiritualist* (3 December, 1875, p. 273) mentioning the possibility of impostors simulating mediumistic phenomena on those occasions when their own powers had failed. Moreover, her mother had been presented to Queen Victoria by her aunt, the wife of Charles Ewan Law who had been not only Recorder of London but M.P. for Cambridge University. Law was the second son of the first Baron Ellenborough, Lord Chief-Justice of England. Thus the conspiracy to cover up Mary's delinquencies was organized by Crookes and connived at by his distinguished colleagues. So successful was it that her "confession" found no place in Frank Podmore's great history of modern Spiritualism or in the pages of the Spiritualist press or in the archives of the S.P.R. It was safe for Mary to lie low for a time before again becoming a famous medium, in which rôle she was still performing as late as 1899, a fact that must have been well known to both Crookes and the Council of the S.P.R.

There is, however, another possibility to be considered, linked with my previous suggestions. We know that Crookes stated that he could not make up his mind about Mary Showers, but, assuming that he was Florence Cook's confederate, he must have realized that she was fraudulent after the joint sittings in his laboratory. Mary's astonishing performances were becoming widely known and Crookes saw that, in order to avoid a major scandal, social as well as Spiritualistic, something had to be done. He therefore approached Miss Fay to get her to supplement what she had heard from Mary and obtain a written statement. This she did and Crookes confronted Mary with it and induced her to promise to cease giving her séances. Now, since Mary knew that Florence was also fraudulent why did she not confront Crookes with her knowledge and threaten him with exposure? This is not such a formidable difficulty as appears at first sight. Had she done so and succeeded, the resulting scandal would have involved herself and her family, Florence Cook and Crookes. But Crookes had, in one sense, the upper hand. He might have told Mary that it was true that Florence was occasionally naughty and played silly tricks, but that he had absolute proof of her being capable of producing genuine phenomena since Mary had failed to satisfy in those very tests where Florence had succeeded. It took a number of meetings for them to settle the affair. After all, Mary was still very young and was possibly overawed by Crookes's

personality and powers of persuasion. Crookes promised to be silent except to a few chosen friends who would also be silent. Mary promised to cease for a time, but broke her promise within a few months as I have said. Crookes remained silent even when Mary was performing in London in 1899 when Crookes was sitting at the Council table at the Society for Psychical Research. For Crookes complete silence was the best policy. Any re-opening of the old scandal might involve Florence Cook and his relations with her and he might even be publicly challenged to make a statement. Such a prospect was not a pleasant one. Thus he himself and his colleagues in the S.P.R. were successful in concealing the truth until the letters written to D. D. Home were released.

It may here be said that those critics among the Society for Psychical Research who are of the opinion that it was wrong of Mr. Hall and other writers to examine the private affairs of the leaders of the Society are clearly unaware of what Mr. Myers himself said in relation to this subject. When the S.P.R. in the 1890's were conducting their campaign against Mme Blavatsky, Mr. Mead, the Secretary of the Theosophical Society, at a public meeting made an indignant protest asking what would be thought if the Theosophical Society had attacked individual members of the S.P.R. Mr. Myers then pointed out that inquiries into Mme Blavatsky's general character bore upon the transcendental phenomena she claimed to exhibit, and similarly it was right that the character of Mr. Stainton Moses should be analysed as to whether he could be trusted or not. In this case Mr. Myers was speaking of persons in whose presence paranormal phenomena were said to occur, but I see no reason to think that similar inquiries should not be made into the private affairs of those who stated that such phenomena did actually occur under their own control and observation.

#### IV CONCLUSIONS

In the foregoing notes I have tried to appraise some of the criticisms of Mr. Trevor Hall's theory which tried to explain the mystery which has always surrounded the relations between Florence Cook and William Crookes. With the gradual release of much documentary and other material relating to the Victorians it was hardly likely that the history of Spiritualism during that period would remain untouched. Revelations about the Carlyles, Swinburne, Dickens and the rest were constantly being published and even the later astonishing stories about Mr. Asquith and Venetia and Edward VII and Darling Daisy did not seem unduly to perturb the critics. I have noticed that many of Mr. Hall's reviewers who were neither Spiritualists nor psychical researchers do not seem to have considered his ideas as impossible or unduly extravagant, in spite of the fact that in his case, owing to the destruction of possibly highly relevant material, he was unable to offer clinching documentary proofs. On the other hand, when his work was published it was greeted with a torrent of emotional hostility by both Spiritualists and psychical researchers, although few if any of these critics had ever themselves made the slightest attempt to examine the early history of their own subject.

The emotional fervour that animated this research was clearly due to the fact that the great hero of Victorian psychical research, Sir William Crookes, came under criticism since Mr. Hall put forward the suggestion that in his work with Florence Cook he was not altogether disinterested since she might have been his mistress at the relevant time. Such a supposition naturally produced consternation in the ranks of both Spiritualists and psychical researchers since it high-lighted the theory held by many writers before and since that parapsychologists were themselves not to be trusted and, if honest, often betrayed a credulity and naiveté difficult to overestimate. As Serjeant Edward W. Cox pointed out at the time, the belief that the full-form materializations were what they claimed to be was difficult enough to accept even if a mass of evidence did not exist that suggested to

any sane man that they were nothing of the kind. It is true that the credulity of those who sincerely believed that Eva Fay had paranormal powers may not have been stranger than the credulity of those who, like Alfred Russel Wallace, thought that Mr. Maskelyne was a medium, or that of people nearer our own time, like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who thought that Houdini might also be psychically gifted. Even if we assume, for the sake of argument, that Florence Cook were genuine, there remains to be explained Crookes's extraordinary behaviour when confronted by such an astonishing miracle. Yet when her sister later followed in her footsteps and the materialized form of Lillie Gordon with her rumbling bowels took the place of the ravishing Katie King, Crookes apparently took not the slightest interest. These strange facts *must* have an explanation and Mr. Hall's critics do not seem to me to have thought of any that will bear careful scrutiny. Their attitude seems to me to be well illustrated by their treatment of Anderson's story. Here are memories of events some of which were first told me in 1922 and then retold over twenty years later. Many of them refer to subjects in which Anderson took no interest, such as the names of Florence Cook's daughters, the age of one of them, the name of one of her sisters and the name of the man whose money they coveted. All these facts were, I venture to suggest, unlikely to have been known to any of Mr. Hall's critics before Anderson mentioned them. Yet rather than express surprise at the amazing accuracy of Anderson's recollections they have done everything possible to pick holes in his story and to show that in a few details of little importance he may have made a few minor mistakes. The astonishing thing is that he made so few. To suppose that he remembered the age of Florence Cook's daughter and then invented the story that Florence is alleged to have told him about Sir William Crookes seems to me to be somewhat unlikely. The hysterical reaction of Mr. Hall's critics was in no way shared by Anderson himself. He did not agree with their opinion that Florence Cook might have been "genuine" and her full-form materializations might have been visitors from the Other World. Unlike many of the officials of the Society for Psychical Research Anderson did not hold the magical way of looking at the world but preferred the strictly rational.

I must now say that of all the solutions of the Crookes-Cook riddle, that held by Mr. Hall still seems to me the most likely and the most reasonable. We know from the evidence of Crookes's own letters that he was quite willing generally to conceal

the fact that he had reason to suppose that Mary Showers was fraudulent and to share the secret with a few friends who connived at the plan. He remained silent when Mary was still giving her performances in a half drunken condition within a few miles of the S.P.R. headquarters. In my opinion he had good reasons for this attitude, as I have argued above. So far as I know Mr. Hall's critics have not attempted an explanation that could satisfy anyone who was acquainted with the full facts. Sir William Crookes, if he were indeed Florence Cook's accomplice, would not be the first or last parapsychologist to be guilty of such behaviour in a greater or lesser degree.

I am aware that one objection to Mr. Hall's theory of Crookes's complicity is that it is thought that Crookes, considering his scientific position, could never have lent himself to a plan whereby, while pretending to undertake an investigation, he was really assisting in the carrying out of a blatant imposture. Thus one critic in commenting upon Mr. Hall's findings declared that it would be very improbable that a scientist should co-operate with a fraudulent medium and produce spurious results in a scientific investigation. From this statement it appears that this objector considered Crookes's work with Florence Cook to have been "a scientific investigation", a quaint notion which throws some light on his ideas of what constitutes a scientific inquiry. Indeed, it is one of the facts that Crookes never permitted any scientific inquiry into the Cook séances that makes the results so suspect and his failure to produce any contemporary notes or detailed accounts increases that suspicion.

As Mr. Hall pointed out in his *Florence Cook and William Crookes: a footnote to an enquiry* (London, 1963) it is just in those fields of work where repeatable experiments are difficult that fraud abounds. Frauds in archaeology are far from unknown and in literary matters the case of Thomas J. Wise, cited by him, was very apt, since, as in the case of Crookes, it seemed to be impossible that Wise could ever have done the things he did do. Yet even here the evidence failed to convince some of his friends, such as, for example, that great Oxford figure, Dean C. H. Wilkinson (1888-1960), who refused to accept the facts relating to Wise. Even apart from archaeological and literary frauds, imposture in scientific matters is not unknown, as Mr. Hall said. It took from 1875 to 1904 for Anton Stecker's spider to be finally relegated to fiction and the case of Calvert's birds of Arran and Chalmers' birds of Angus are ornithological fictions known to all bird lovers.

Although I agree that some weight should be attached to these objections to Mr. Hall's theory I still do not think that they are in any way compelling or conclusive. It cannot be too often repeated that three choices are available. Either Florence Cook was a genuine medium, and Katie King, Leila and the rest, were materialized forms, or she was not. Or was Crookes completely deceived by her, even when she was living in his own house? Or, on the other hand, was Crookes *not* deceived by her, but was her protector and co-operator in the fraud? Everyone is entitled to his own opinion on what the probabilities are. Mr. Hall prefers the last and has given some evidence for his belief. I find myself still in agreement with him, in spite of the torrent of criticism and abuse to which he has been subjected. In my view the defence has not made out its case and I think it may be suggestive that so few of the critics have stated bluntly which of the three choices they prefer.

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## LIST OF REFERENCES

### ABBREVIATIONS EMPLOYED

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 JASPR *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research*  
 JOP *Journal of Parapsychology*

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